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Diversity as Contingent: An Intersectional Ethnographic Interrogation of and Resistance Against  
Neoliberal Academia's Exploitation of Contingent Faculty in General Education Diversity  
Courses

By  
Kelly Louise Opdycke

Claremont Graduate University

2020

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## **Approval of the Dissertation Committee**

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Kelly Louise Opdycke as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies.

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## **Abstract**

Diversity as Contingent: An Intersectional Ethnographic Interrogation of and Resistance Against  
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By

Kelly Louise Opdycke

Claremont Graduate University: 2020

Since its inception in the late 1970s, neoliberal academia has increasingly relied in underpaid contingent faculty to carry its teaching workload. During this same time, neoliberal academia began to take up 'diversity' as a way to sell its brand. This dissertation stands at the crux between diversity branding and the exploitation of contingent faculty. Specifically, I explore how teaching General Education diversity courses through precarity impacts contingent faculty affectively and emotionally.

Michel Foucault (1979) describes those who live in the context of neoliberalism as homo economicus, or entrepreneur of the self. As one becomes stuck in contingency, they begin to question whether they graded fast enough or said the wrong thing. Concurrently, they might begin to see how their contingent position is a bit different from their students or their colleagues. Importantly, I bring Patricia Hill Collins' (2019) most recent work on intersectionality to help better understand how relationality and power differences impact feelings of precarity while being contingent and also teaching GE diversity courses. Through the lens of Foucault, Collins, and other works on affect and intersectionality, I seek to capture ways these faculty navigate teaching about precarity while being precarious.

To this end, I employ feminist and queer ethnographic methods. Through autoethnography, I show how my identities as white, working-class, and neurodivergent pull me in multiple directions, leaving me exhausted as I do my best to navigate my GE diversity courses. With this in mind, I turn to my colleagues to explore how their identities impact their negotiations with these types of courses. While listening to my colleagues, I also realize how contingency molds my ethnographic process. Contingency forces me to interrogate a system that is not structured for my upward mobility. The collective bumps and bruises between my colleagues and I implore us to form a make-shift community of care, where we talk about the difficulties of doing diversity work in the classroom. After reading this work, I hope others better grasp the impact of placing diversity work onto the shoulders of contingent faculty. It is hard to teach students to care within a system that does not care about us. It is hard to care without care.

## **Dedication**

For D. Robert DeChaine for believing in all of us

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I cannot express the gratitude I feel upon completing this work. I am thankful to every student, colleague, and person I've interacted with because each one shaped how I approach the world. Here, I want to offer some names, but this is by no means a comprehensive list.

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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Homo Economicus, Precarity, and Intersectionality: The Molding of a Contingent Diversity Workforce.....	36
Chapter Two: The Evolution of Neoliberal Academia in the United States and Its Inevitable Exploitation of Diversity.....	59
Chapter Three: Shedding the Shards of Expectations: My Negotiation Between Neurodivergency, Whiteness, and a Working – Class Identity Within GE Diversity Courses....	93
Chapter Four: Using Ethnography to Dissolve the Stickiness of Contingency: An Intersectional Feminist Exploration of Being Stuck in Contingency.....	124
Chapter Five: The Emergence of a Pedagogical Community As Care-Work in Precarious Times.....	159
Conclusion.....	183
Appendix.....	203
Notes.....	204
Works Cited.....	205

## Introduction

In 2001, I began my academic career in an Indiana college town thirty minutes from my high school. My mom and I packed her Chevy Aztec to maximum capacity earlier in the day. As we pulled up to the six-floor dormitory where I would be sharing a room with a stranger for the next year, I tried to pretend I was not nervous to start this part of my life. My stomach felt heavy and I guarded myself around everyone I met on this first day (and a few weeks after). Most of these nerves were about a transition into the unknown. Not simply an unknown of living on my own, after all I had been training for that since my first job. Although my younger self would not admit this, I realize now I was scared because I had no idea how to ‘do’ college. As a student from a rural county school that did not prioritize college for those who were not exceptional students (and I was not), I received little guidance from counselors on what to expect and how to navigate college. And as the first member of my extended family (including four aunts and uncles and their kids), I knew I had to set an example for my cousins and my younger sibling. Very little about my life made me feel like I belonged in college, but there I was.

Despite my anxieties, I was really excited to experience a different way of life. Specifically, I remember being excited about the ‘diversity’ advertised in the university branding, but I never saw, or heard, the diversity in my classes. Today, as a blossoming academic and university instructor in Southern California, I still do not feel like I belong. However, I see and hear the efforts of diversity all around me. In order to encourage diverse perspectives, many universities mandate General Education (GE) diversity courses. For example, the California State University (CSU) system requires one diversity course for every graduate. As a contingent faculty member who teaches a few of these courses within this system, I play a role in how students understand the word (and action of) diversity. And, unsurprisingly, that role is tough. Initially, I thought my

struggles with these courses related to my relatively short experience as a teacher. As I began talking with some of my fellow contingent faculty, I realized this type of diversity work does not get much easier with experience. I also began to discover, semester after semester, that my contingent peers were the ones who typically taught these diversity courses. After various conversations with my peers in our shared office space, in the hallways, and on our walks to the parking lot, I realized this issue needed to be explored in more detail, especially because these courses shape how students understand diversity. Although the experience might be different than when I was a student, academics still have much work to do in how they do diversity work.

In the United States, contingent faculty make up 70% of the workforce (Curtis & Thornton, 2013). A contingent faculty is an instructor who teaches for an institution without a guarantee of a future position. Many of these faculty members struggle with their positions as contingent on funding the next semester. Because of their contingent position, it is no wonder these faculty members are more likely than their peers to deal with depression, stress, and anxiety (Reevy & Deason, 2014). Adding to their lack of job security, these contingent faculty members deal with stressors such as a lack of institutional support and no physical office to work in (Reevy & Deason). They are also more likely to be from marginalized communities compared to their tenured and tenure-track peers (Finkelstein, Conley, & Schuster, 2016). As academia continues to heavily rely on contingent faculty, institutions must consider ways they might better support contingent faculty, especially in instances when contingent faculty take on the emotional labor of GE diversity courses. This research hopes to give institutions a firmer grasp on the day-to-day lives of contingent faculty. With this dissertation, I aim to explore the experiences of contingent faculty in a few ways. First, I plan to illustrate how the reliance on contingent faculty might be impacting these faculty members in differently. Second, I want to show how contingent faculty

who teach GE diversity courses negotiate the neoliberal pressure of teaching, and surviving, these courses in unique ways. Third, I hope to provide one example of how these contingent faculty members work together to become better equipped to teach diversity courses.

While previous research provides a useful foundation for setting up the issue, if you are contingent like myself, you did not need previous research to tell us our conditions lead to depression and anxiety. With this work, I provide an on-the-ground representation of the effects of neoliberal academia on contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses. This focus addresses a gap in knowledge of how this group might be taking on a challenging part of the diversity work, the work of reaching students who might not recognize the importance of diversity. Questions I address in the following chapters include: How does a person's understanding of their position as a contingent faculty member teaching GE diversity courses influence the ways they negotiate their management of their wellbeing inside and outside of the classroom? In particular, how do those who teach GE diversity courses navigate these pressures in different ways, as they are expected to teach those outside of their field who might be less likely to see the benefit of taking their course? How might a person's identity markers influence the way they negotiate their management of their wellbeing? What are some possibilities for contingent faculty to work together, and with other types of faculty, to alleviate some of these pressures? With this research, I seek to better understand how the neoliberal atmosphere places unique constraints of wellbeing on contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses. More importantly, I hope to identify some ways these faculty reveal creative and necessary ways to work against a neoliberal academic climate in order to teach these courses that at least partially oppose some neoliberal values. To this end, I supplement affect theoretical frameworks with the intersectional approach of black feminist scholars such as Kimberlee Crenshaw (1991) and

Patricia Hill Collins (2019) in order to perform a feminist ethnography of my campus. Upon completion, my dissertation aims to shape the way academic institutions (mis)use diversity work and those who perform the brunt of it. On a broader note, this research offers a glimpse into how marginalized individuals negotiate environments that realize the value of hiring individuals from multiple positionalities but have yet to recognize (or care about) the emotional toll it might take on those individuals. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the core arguments found throughout this dissertation. I also offer a chapter layout.

### **Neoliberal Conditions of Academia**

Academia's reliance on contingent faculty creates issues for the institution, the students, and faculty of all types. While this research focuses on the experience of contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses, it relies on the understanding of the multiple decades of academia's shift toward a neoliberalism. To be clear, a neoliberal academic institution prioritizes profit more than education. In their extensive work academic capitalism, higher education scholars Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades (1997) believe academic institutions began seeing education as a market-good in order to defend itself in the neoliberal world of the 1970s. During this time, the government began defunding colleges and universities, causing them to seek out new ways of financial survival, including hiring more contingent faculty. As academia became branded as a necessary step in achieving a career, it shifted to meet the needs of multiple types of communities, especially marginalized populations who began to be accepted in increasing numbers in the 1970s and 1980s (Ferguson, 2012).

In the 1990s, the university became more neoliberal in order to adapt to a world that prioritized selling knowledge rather than learning it. This neoliberal adaptation includes partnerships with major corporations as well as the treatment of education as a product to be sold

(Slaughter & Rhoades, 2000; 2004). Soon, colleges and universities began branding themselves as ‘diverse,’ making way for the exploitation of the marginalized populations who had been folded into the institution through affirmative action policies. When the neoliberal academic institution chooses to sell diversity as part of their brand, marginalized faculty end up feeling the most tension. Since contingent faculty tend to be marginalized populations (Flaherty, 2016), and they tend to teach GE diversity courses, it is quite possible that these responsibilities weigh heavily on these faculty in particular. In Chapter Two, I provide a deep exploration of the neoliberal academic institution from its early inception in the 1970s through the context of the 2010s. In this section, I provide a quick overview of the problem of the neoliberal institution as it relates to the exploitation of both the diversity brand and the contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses.

Through the lens of cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams, Henry Giroux (2010) sees neoliberalism as much more than an economic theory. He believes neoliberalism results in “a radically refigured cultural politics” that includes a reshaping of pedagogical address (Giroux, 487). Giroux describes the type of pedagogy in a neoliberal institution as corporate public pedagogy, a pedagogy that negates the critical agency of all involved. A neoliberal academic institution is one that encourages faculty to see students as consumers and trains these consumers to be proper actors in a capitalist society. As corporate public pedagogy takes place, students become trained in passivity and conformity rather than critical thinking. Students, as the consumers, also expect to be given what they believe they have paid for, an education that will help them achieve a career.

Importantly, Giroux does not limit this public pedagogy to schools and other academic institutions. He believes corporate public pedagogy takes place in sports, media, churches, and

various forms of popular cultures. He invites cultural studies scholars to take up the challenge of rethinking the current political and pedagogical systems as intertwined with each other. It is within the interconnectedness of these systems, Giroux (2010) believes, scholars could begin to intervene in the “crisis of democracy” (498). This dissertation provides a slight intervention into this crisis by showing how contingent faculty members maneuver between working within a neoliberal atmosphere while also talking about the neoliberal world. In my research, I show the struggles it takes to actually perform the intervention Giroux asks for in courses that are required for graduation. Because I believe different individuals understand and experience their identities and work experiences differently, I worked towards highlighting a range of different levels of satisfaction or frustration as well as a range of strategies that contingent faculty employ in navigating a neoliberal academic institution. I hope other contingent faculty might learn from these different strategies when preparing to teach GE diversity courses in the future.

While the examination of how this neoliberal trend influences all levels of academia is important, my experience as a contingent faculty member moves me to attempt to understand how those contingent faculty who teach might be affected by the constraints of this type of institutions and how these constraints influence the classroom. In a recent *Studies in Higher Education* article, Leslie Gonzales, E. Martinez, and Chinasa Ordu (2014) explore how the ideology of neoliberal academia affects the experience of faculty. After performing campus fieldwork and surveying 180 professors, they find neoliberalism adds “a heightened sense of pressure” to faculty members (1110). Specifically, faculty felt their work and life boundaries became blurred, their management of time became stricter, and their sense of surveillance became heightened.

Giroux believes corporate public pedagogy “largely cancels out or devalues gender, class-specific, and racial injustices” (486). In this environment, a student might walk into a GE diversity course expecting to get a certain skill for their career. If they did not expect to have their perspectives challenged, they might push back against their classmates as well as their instructor. The neoliberal academic institution does all of this while at the same time finding ways to put a price on diversity. By adding more marginalized groups, universities become more diverse. The neoliberal academic institution utilizes this shift in demographics. For example, many colleges sell themselves based on their diversity. The all-encompassing term ‘diversity’ functions to show potential students (and faculty) that they would fit right in, no matter how they identify. Colleges sell this by including photos of their diverse student body in their advertisements. The work it takes to create a diverse space is not included in this brand. I present snapshots of this work in the following chapters.

Not only does teaching diversity in the context of neoliberalism create a conundrum for faculty, but they must also deal with a sense of out-of-place-ness if they are from a marginalized group. In her reflection on teaching in a diverse college called “Challenging Oppression in Moderation? Student Feedback in Diversity Courses,” Anita Chikkatur (2016) writes, “It seems like bodies of color are still wanted, but the challenges these bodies might pose to the institution and changes these bodies might demand from the institution still are not always acknowledged, and certainly not welcomed” (98 – 99). As a junior faculty member teaching racial and gender diversity courses, Chikkatur finds she must do a lot of mentoring for other students who look like her and feel out of place. At the same time, she must negotiate between this mentoring and appeasing the frustration of some of her other students who resist discussions on diversity and



difference. She wonders if she takes it too easy on some of her students in order to gain approval from them so that she can continue moving up the academic ladder.

Of course, Chikkatur's experience is one of many, especially as schools continue to push the buzzword of diversity. In her book *On Being Included*, Sara Ahmed (2012) explores the actualities of using diversity as a selling point. Ahmed describes herself as a diversity practitioner. As a woman of color hired at a primarily white institution, Ahmed finds herself doing 'diversity work' for the institution. Ahmed explores ways this diversity work ties up professors of color, queer professors, and all other professors who are not white, straight cismen, preventing them from doing the actual work of changing the institutions to meet the needs of diverse faculty and students.

Through her reading, completing, and filing of institutional documents, Ahmed finds some diversity work allows institutions to overlook racism. For example, as a diversity worker, she finds herself checking boxes to establish diversity while very rarely being asked to do work to shift the categories or the way those within these categories do not quite fit into the institution. This creates tension for her because she knows the checking of boxes is important. She writes, "To proceed as if the categories do not matter because they should not matter would be to fail to show how the categories continue to ground social existence" (182). At the same time, her grounded experience reveals these categories could be wider and more inclusive. With my work, I offer a thick description of examples of this social existence on the ground. While my research will not be representative of this entire experience, it should provide direction on where to focus more work so that professors who fit into certain categories feel as if their institution recognizes and values their presence, especially when they put in diversity work. The focus of contingent faculty is necessary as they are underrepresented in research, but I believe my work could help

many different categories of faculty, as well as students, who allow the institution to be demographically diverse, but who do not always feel included. An examination of those who teach GE diversity courses allows me to better understand how those of different identities deal with the diversity work Ahmed discusses in her book.

As academia uses diversity and inclusion as a selling point, those within the classroom begin to see a change. Students want the diversity they pay for, but the expectations of what diversity and/or inclusion in a classroom might look like is unclear for many. The expectations of the diverse neoliberal academy place an unfair burden on contingent faculty members. More specifically, as contingent faculty members tend to be more diverse than tenured faculty (Finkelstein, Conley, & Schuster, 2016), they might receive more pressure to do diversity work than other types of faculty (Ahmed, 2012). This diversity work requires emotional labor that might influence the way their classrooms function, possibly leading to stress, burnout, and frustration (Ahmed, 2012). In order to explore different ways the performance of diversity work by contingent faculty leads to negative emotions, I use my standpoint as contingent faculty member at a four-year public institution to illustrate the experiences of my colleagues and myself. Later chapters in this dissertation reveal a multitude of ways contingent faculty members negotiate the requirements of diversity work in the classroom and how this affects their mental wellbeing.

Importantly, as the university capitalizes on diversity, it undoubtedly leaves out some categories that should be included in the diversity discussion. For example, diversity work should also include creating space for those with mental and cognitive disabilities, but those of us who deal with them typically feel out of place in the university. Kristen Lindgren (2016) writes of this experience in “The (S)paces of Academic Work: Disability, Access, and Higher

Education.” In one of her first semesters teaching, her department tasked her with a deaf student. Her chair told her, “she had to put him *somewhere*” (113). Quickly, Lindgren realized how much the university as well as her pedagogical training lacked in this important area of diversity. She writes, “Too often, disability continues to be viewed through frameworks of pathology and abnormalcy rather than those of identity and human diversity” (114). With this experience, Lindgren learns pedagogical strategies that currently serve her for students with and without disabilities. She concludes by saying, “Access also involves a way of thinking about the world that challenges us to imagine how another body, another mind, experiences it” (120). The autoethnographic chapter of this dissertation shows what this type of negotiation is like for me, someone who identifies as having invisible disabilities. Throughout my ethnographic work, I invited conversations about the exclusion of disability. I also tried to leave the door open for other interpretations of what positionalities should be included in discussions of diversity.

Some autoethnographers have started exploring how neoliberalism influences their experience in academia. In her essay “Academic Labor in the Age of Anxiety,” Elissa Foster (2017) provides an autoethnographic look at the anxiety created by neoliberalism. She suggests the expectation that she see students as consumers adds extra pressure on her to make her students feel comfortable. She must hold herself back in order to create a comfortable, satisfied student or deal with the consequences of negative student reviews. She writes, “When it comes time to perform my role as a professor there is no need for surveillance because I am already primed to gag myself” (Foster, 323). As a tenure-track faculty member, Foster hopes to maintain satisfaction to help boost the possibility of tenure. Although she recognizes the problem of playing into the system, she originally felt it was worth it in order to make change in the long run. She quickly learns tenure is not the magical place where change might occur. She writes,

“Having recently passed through that final “hoop” to achieve tenure, I am dismayed to find that I do not feel empowered to speak more freely in in the classroom nor to write and publish more critical and cutting-edge research” (325). She goes on to write her anxiety over publishing this essay. It seems neoliberal pressure does not go away even after an upgrade in position.

While the anxieties of tenured and tenure-track faculty are an important part in understanding the neoliberal academic institution, contingent faculty face even more pressure because many of them are not guaranteed a job the following semester. They may not be required to do as much research or serve on as many committees, but they typically take on much of the teaching load. My research illustrates ways contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses navigate pressures from students and other faculty in different ways. This is especially true if a position is at least partially contingent on positive evaluations from students who might not be intrigued by courses outside of their major. Previous research tells us that students who have little interest in a course are more likely to give negative evaluations (Marsh & Copper, 1981; Marsh & Dunkin, 1992). Adding to this, an instructor’s gender, race, age, and other identity markers influences ways students evaluated them (Arbuckle & Williams, 2003; Boring, 2016). Although previous research calls into question the usefulness of student evaluations, universities continue to rely on them as they consider future employment. When balancing between the need to make students uncomfortable in diversity education with the likelihood of negative evaluations from those same students, Chikkatur (2016) asks, “what can be done to support faculty who want to structure their classes in ways that challenge students and that lead students to be uncomfortable and perhaps even angry?” (107). Later chapters explore some of the ways contingent faculty navigate between challenging students mind without pushing them far

enough to become angry. My conclusion speculates on what might need to be done at the departmental and institutional level to help contingent work through these challenges.

Finally, it is important to take into account the multiple positionalities of each contingent faculty involved in my research. In order to briefly illustrate how identities might affect the way one deals with the neoliberal academic institution, I turn to Ahmet Atay's autoethnographic essay "Journey of Errors" (2018). In this piece, Atay illustrates ways his queer, postcolonial identity influences whether others listen to his voice as well as whether others feel like he belongs. For him, things like small office space and the requirement to use this small space to mentor students creates a sense of out-of-place-ness he wishes to avoid. Adding to this, his tendency to tell his stories in a circular way, as is typical in his family, causes many of his peers to lose attention. Professors, and now peers, correct his grammar, causing him to feel he continues to make errors in the way he should be fitting in. Again, the experiences of a tenure-track professor can be utilized to imagine how contingent faculty of similar positionalities must negotiate their own efforts of fitting in. Throughout my research, I attempted to find faculty who represent a variety of positionalities to talk with in order to add layers in understanding how identity plays a role in dealing with a neoliberal academic institution as a contingent faculty who teaches GE diversity courses. I discuss more about these attempts, and how they were not always successful, in later chapters.

### **The Affective Molding of Neoliberal Bodies**

The overreliance on contingent faculty to teach GE diversity courses impacts the mental well-being of these faculty, placing the diversity work burden on a group of precarious faculty who must consider how their actions might impact their future course offerings. As I seek to explore this problem, I start with Michel Foucault's neoliberal conceptualization of homo

economicus. Then, I add Isabell Lorey's thoughts on precarity to illustrate the importance of this effect on homo economicus. Finally, I supplement these affective notions with the black feminist concept of intersectionality because this framework calls attention to ways intersecting positionalities might make one more precarious than another, especially in courses that highlight these positionalities. Chapter Two provides a thorough look at how I bring these concepts together to create my theoretical lens. In this section, I introduce each notion as a guide for the rest of the text.

In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Michel Foucault (1979/2008) lectures on, among other things, the government's role in shaping neoliberal bodies. He considers the United States as a unique location to explore the impacts of neoliberalism because of its foundational value of liberalism. He writes, "Liberalism in America is a whole way of being and thinking" (218). Foucault sees neoliberalism's main difference from liberalism in the way it understands human capital. Rather than seeing human capital as one piece of the economic process, neoliberalism emphasizes the 'human' part of human capital. Neoliberals realize that productivity must factor into the rationalization of the human involved in it.

But, of course, simply understanding the 'human' part of this process does not mean neoliberals prioritize care of humans. Instead, it prioritizes understanding how to make the human *want* to work as much as possible in order to shape productivity; thus, the creation of the neoliberal homo economicus. Foucault describes this as an entrepreneur of oneself, "being for himself his own capital, being of himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings" (226). This type of worker becomes responsible for their economic condition. In other words, if an individual does not make enough money at their current position, it is their fault.

They have the agency to find a better paying job or, if they cannot, that is still not the fault of the system. It is because they simply did not work hard enough.

If an individual finds oneself in an economically precarious position, it is their fault in the neoliberal world. As I consider contingent faculty, who are in precarious positions and teach GE diversity courses, it is pertinent to consider how other types of precarity might shape how they confront the challenges of their position. In *State of Insecurity*, Isabell Lorey (2015) describes precarity as an obsession of the subject created by the government. Of its connection to neoliberalism, she writes, "...neoliberal governing proceeds primarily through social insecurity, through regulating the minimum of assurance while simultaneously increasing instability" (3). If taken with Foucault's notion of homo economicus, Lorey's thoughts on precarity reveal a subject that not only serves as an entrepreneur of oneself, but also one that will also be swimming against the current of neoliberalism. Even if they gain the job they want, Lorey believes there is always some sense of instability keeping them worried. This affective reaction makes it difficult to ever be at ease.

Building off of previous scholarship from Judith Butler (2004), Lorey observes that some dimensions of precarity offer opportunity to build identification with those who are different. In other words, precarity has the potential to bring people together. Unfortunately, some governments attempt to eliminate this potential. Lorey explains how governments shape the subject's understanding of precarity through the creation of a hierarchy of precarity. At the same time, the government shapes the subject into believing they are in a constant state of precarity, shaping what Lorey calls the precarious subject. Through their understanding of the hierarchy of precarity, the precarious subject begins to see some other subjects as undeserving of care in order to protect themselves and those similar to them.

Thus far, Lorey's work offers a descriptive of the state of the neoliberal world. Contingent faculty fit somewhere within the precarity hierarchy she discusses, but, if one considers the context of academia, the precarity of students, administrators, and tenured and tenure-track faculty are above them. Because of this, until recently, they have been mostly left out of discussions on the state of academia. Towards the end of *State of Insecurity*, Lorey shifts her focus to offer prospective thoughts on how society might shift from their obsession with security to a logic of care. Here, she sees the possibility of the care work unaccounted or under accounted for in a neoliberal society to move to the forefront, interrupting neoliberal norms. While she does not go so far as to suggest this shift could bring unity between subjects, she believes it could create critical dialogue between them that could allow them to see their interrelatedness. It is here where she believes a monster precariat might form, one that demands change to a system that does not care about the precarity it has inflicted on its subject. I include this portion of her work because I believe the precarity of all subjects within neoliberal academia could be used to spark dialogue between those on different parts of the hierarchy. Of course, I mean those towards the top, especially administrators, but I also mean janitorial staff and food service workers who are even more overlooked than contingent faculty.

This brings me to the concept of intersectionality. Originally, I planned to place this concept as part of my methodology section because it not only informs the questions I hope to ask, but it also informs the way I ask questions of those I interact with throughout the ethnographic process. After reading Lorey's text, I realized I needed to move the concept to my theoretical framework to supplement my approach to the hierarchy of precarity. By now, most familiar with feminism know Kimberlee Crenshaw (1991) used the concept intersectionality to magnify how black women were disproportionately negatively impacted by the legal system.



However, feminists of color from Sojourner Truth to Angela Davis to Gloria Anzaldúa have been taking an intersectional approach since what seems like forever. Since a short section in an introduction (or in the following chapter) could not do the complexity of this concept justice, I want to focus on Patricia Hill Collins' *Intersectionality As Critical Social Theory* (2019) because it is within this text that I began to see how to ground my theoretical lens in this concept.

Although Collins believes it is important for intersectionality to be open and flexible to ways scholars use it, she also thinks it is necessary to pin down crucial elements of the concept before academia takes hold and controls (neutralizes) its potential. She offers six core constructs to guide intersectional scholars: relationality, power, social inequality, social context, complexity, and social justice. All six of these constructs guide this dissertation and I expand on each one in Chapter Two. For now, I want to focus on the two most important for my theoretical lens. Relationality offers a way out of the binary framework many parts of academia rely on. Binary frameworks tend to focus on difference or sameness. According to Collins, a relational approach to difference recognizes "...distinctions, yet seek[s] patterns of connection among entities that are understood as different. For relational difference, the challenge lies in uncovering points of connection, overlap, or intersection (e.g., men and women may be different but their gender experiences are interconnected)" (218). My work aims to tease out the interconnectedness of contingent faculty with themselves and other parts of neoliberal academia.

When discussing social justice, Collins explains an intersectional scholar's ethics must be supported with the goal of social justice in mind. Without social justice, a project might appear intersectional because of the focus on different aspects of identity, but then lead to the creation (or reinforcement) of a hierarchical system. Collins writes, "Uncoupling intersectionality from its commitment to social justice might garner academic legitimation for intersectionality, but it

might also undermine the integrity of intersectionality's *critical inquiry*" (275, italics author's own). If it is not clear already, social justice is at the core of this work. From the way I hope to understand an exploited workforce to the hopes of allowing this understanding to influence how diversity is utilized in academia, I am committed to making academia a more socially just environment.

### **Feminist and Queer Ethnography**

As I attempted to understand my experience and the experience of others in the context of neoliberal academia, I made cautious methodological choices in order to place these different wisdoms in tension with each other. According to Christa Craven and Dána-Ain Davis, an important tenet of feminist ethnography is the grounding of work in feminist theory. As shown in the previous section, I ground my research in work on precarity and intersectionality.

Throughout this dissertation, I think through the wisdom of my experience in tension with the wisdom of other contingent faculty. It is critical to move back and forth between the two in order to grasp the complicated intersectional differences and similarities in the experiences of contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses. Not only do I realize I can never capture enough experiences to find the essential understanding of negotiations taking place in and surrounding GE diversity courses, I hope the realities of faculty included in this work complicate this understanding. The following paragraphs offer a glimpse of how I use feminist and queer ethnographies to ground my methodological choices.

Elana Buch and Karen Staller (2014) describe feminist ethnography as one "informed by feminist theories and ethics" that "attends to the interplays between gender and other forms of power and difference" (113). Feminist ethnography looks at the effects of power on individuals through the recognition of validity of all standpoints. I approach this dissertation as a sometimes

queer, white ciswoman who is the first person in her extended working-class family to go to college. I also deal with mental illness and cognitive disabilities that are sometimes hard to distinguish from each other. These positionalities provide me with some privileges as I negotiate GE diversity courses, but also with some challenges. They also impact how I formulate my questions, which places I choose to observe, and how I conduct other parts of my ethnographic process. As I conduct my interviews, I must also be cognizant of how my positionality as a relatively new contingent faculty in the Communication Studies Department might influence the ways my interviewees interact with me. For example, while attempting to contact potential interviewees, I did my best to persuade contingent faculty of other departments that my intentions were to help as many parts of CSUN as possible, but since I did not receive many responses, it is hard to know how effective I was with these attempts. While it is impossible to not allow my positionality to influence interactions with other faculty, I kept this in the front of my mind through the creation of my questions, the interview, and the interpretation of the interviews.

Sara Ahmed's criticisms of ethnography illustrate the problems positionality creates for ethnographic work. In *Strange Encounters*, Ahmed (2000) explores how and why we deem some encounters stranger than others. Ahmed's interest lies in how relationships between those who are considered strange and those who are not assist in creating boundaries that help define each group. In other words, when one understands another to be strange, they are able to better solidify what they understand themselves to be based on what the strange appears to be. Ahmed believes part of this process creates stranger fetishism, or an obsession with those who are different. This does not necessarily mean non-strangers view strangers as bad. Rather, strangers become the fantasies of the non-strangers, cutting them off from their histories. Ahmed provides

the example of Western feminists and transnational feminists. Western feminists tend to focus on the difference between them and these ‘strange’ feminists, creating their own understanding of who they are. By simply using the term ‘transnational feminists,’ Western feminists cut off the complicated history of each group of feminists throughout the world.

To illustrate the problems that arise with stranger fetishism, Ahmed criticizes traditional ethnographic methods. She describes ethnography as a process that turns strangeness “into a technique for the accumulation of knowledge” (60). She believes one might recognize another as a stranger because they recognize that stranger as lacking knowledge. Some ethnographers who go into the field to explore a community recognize the community members as strangers because they assume the community members do not think about what makes their community a community (i.e. unique, different, or, of course, strange). Ahmed suggests these ethnographers do not consider similarities that might exist between this community and their own. Instead, the ethnographers create a strange community. As usual, Ahmed puts this in more metaphorical terms. She describes the creation of the stranger as a sneeze that comes out of the ethnographer. She writes, “The sneeze which allows the figure of the stranger to take shape, as if it were ‘outside’ of the knowledge, can be understood, not as a form of purification (where there is no *trace* of the stranger left in the body), but as a form of contamination” (56). In other words, while the ethnographer might tell some truths about a community, the truth becomes skewed by the ethnographer’s perspective.

Ahmed offers a few suggestions on how ethnographers could avoid stranger fetishism. First, she calls for them to consider how they (re)produce strangeness in their texts. This includes the consideration of how one might be speaking for or about a community rather than attempting to allow this community’s unique knowledge to come through on its own. Second, related to the

first, Ahmed believes a dialogical ethnographic process shows ethnography is always a partial work. This provides an opportunity to question the knowledge and power for the ethnographer as much as it might those of the community being studied. Third, she suggests ethnographers treat their relationships to their ‘informants’ differently. Rather than informants, these community members could become partners in the research process. Or, sometimes they become friends. Finally, Ahmed ends her critique of ethnography by supposing failure to know the stranger should be part of the ethnographic process. Again, openness about not being able to know them provides a path for readers to avoid seeing the ethnographer as all-knowing. In this dissertation, I incorporated these ideas in the way I conducted my process by allowing those interviewed to respond to anything written about them. Sometimes, these responses were of simple approval. Other times, they engaged in dialogue with me. If they chose dialogue, I included that in my work. I also allowed for things I simply could not do (because I could not convince someone to respond to me or because I did not have the time), to be things I could not see. Adding to this, Chapter Five offers a glimpse at how I collaborated with some of those I interviewed in order to shape the community of contingent faculty in our department.

As I work to avoid stranger fetishism, I also must consider ways I might accidentally exploit those I choose to include in my research. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) discusses ways indigenous researchers might decolonize academia. She writes, “It needs a radical compassion that reaches out, that seeks collaboration, and that is open to possibilities that can only be imagined as other things fall into place” (xii). As a body that signifies colonization, I do not want to describe what I plan to do as decolonizing. However, I can learn from Smith’s perspective as an academic trying to better understand how neoliberalism influences academia. Specifically, I listened when some of my interviewees suggested a new way of seeing things for

my project. On an individual level, this looked like allowing each interviewee to write out how they would prefer to be identified for my work, so that I did not force them into identity boxes they do not claim. On a larger level, as I interacted with those from departments who were facing harsher budget cuts than my department, my interviewees pushed me to explore the institutional support for diversity as a whole, including the support of the union. While I was not able to include my work on this larger level in this dissertation, it is something I am actively working on with other contingent faculty members. I touch on this briefly in Chapter Five and in the conclusion.

Although all ethnography relies on exploitation on some level, I did my best to see that those involved in my process got something out of the project too, but I also realized that not everyone expected something in return, or at least the things I had to offer. As Smith expands her notion of decolonizing methodologies, she explains how academics move into indigenous spaces to gather information, sometimes with good intentions, but these researchers can be damaging to the group they intend to help. Of these good intentions, Smith writes, “It becomes taken for granted that many researchers simply assume that they as individuals embody this ideal and are natural representatives of it when they work with other communities” (2). Smith suggests those who study indigenous cultures might open up their understanding of research by looking at ways indigenous groups are already doing their own without the explicit labels like ‘collaborative research’ (25). Again, my context is different than what Smith is referencing, but her advice guided me in not forcing my agenda, even a collaborative one, on others. I have discussed some of my efforts to collaborate above, but after conducting my interviews I realized what I sort of already knew: many contingent faculty are overworked and do not have time for collaboration. Of course, this is the product of a neoliberal climate. However, Chapter Five plants the seed of

possibility within my department. I have a long-term goal of an ongoing collaboration between my department and others to build some support for contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses. As I continue to build trust and learn things from other contingent faculty, perhaps more possibilities will arise.

Many of Ahmed's and Smith's suggestions have direct ties to feminist ethnography. Specifically, their concerns with knowledge production and power dynamics within this creation are core components of feminist ethnography. But, so far, Ahmed's and Smith's ideas seem to be examples of critical ethnographies, not feminist ones. Feminist ethnography is different from other types of ethnography in that it uses gender as a starting point when looking at the power dynamics within a community. In their attempt to think through feminist ethnography, Dana-Ain Davis and Christa Craven (2016) emphasize that there is, and should not be, one clear definition of feminist ethnography. They provide a few tenets that might be incorporated in a working definition of the feminist ethnographic process, including the acknowledgement of the researcher's power in their research as well as commitment to challenging marginalization and injustice (11). In case this is not yet obvious, both of these tenets guide me in the way I write about my experience and the experience of other contingent faculty member. And, of course, since contingent faculty tend to be disproportionately women and teaching tends to be thought of through a gendered, feminized lens, all signs point to gender as one part of the center.

Christa Craven and Dana-Ain Davis (2013) include movement building and service to the community as one of these tenets. In *Feminist Activist Ethnography*, they identify how feminist ethnography might serve as a method that interrogates the impact of neoliberalism. They write, "...feminist ethnography – which privileges particularity and the importance of individual experience, situated within uneven systems of power – can be central in uncovering how

neoliberalist policies lurk in people's everyday lives" (15). This interrogation process provides a pathway to resist neoliberalism. Specifically, Craven and Davis suggest feminist ethnographers should not only work towards allowing marginalized voices to be heard but should also use their work to build communities that push against the neoliberal pressures inside and outside of these communities. My project aims to achieve both of these goals. Primarily, I utilize this dissertation to allow contingent faculty members to speak of their experience. Secondly, I hope this project sparks interest in working against the neoliberal system that leaves so many of these faculty members frustrated and exhausted. While change may not come as a direct result of this dissertation, I hope more academics take up the interest of change as it relates to the intersections of the exploitation of both diversity and contingent faculty.

Chapters Three and Four offer glimpses of why taking up this interest of change is necessary. Both of these chapters show the struggles of contingent faculty who teach difficult topics related to parts of their identity. As certain parts of their identity become examples of diversity, their contingency becomes even more precarious. All of a sudden, a neurodivergent instructor is talking about neurodivergency and then they begin to reflect on how their own neurodivergency might make students feel uncomfortable. Or an instructor who is a relative of a DACA recipient becomes angry when a student criticizes the policy. This instructor moves from relatively aware of their precariousness to extremely aware as their anger begins to grow. In these circumstances, power dynamics quickly shift to impact the affective nature of precarity.

Feminist ethnography serves to be attentive to the power dynamics in the relationship between ethnographer, these instructors, and their students. Queer ethnography adds to this interest in power dynamics by focusing on categories and how categories are (un)made. In "Queer in the Field," Alison Rooke (2010) describes queer ethnography as one that not only



concentrates on queer individuals, but it also questions conventions of ethnographic methods. She writes, “More specifically this includes addressing the assumed stability and coherence of the ethnographic self and outlining how this self is performed in writing and doing research” (25). Queer ethnography insists on not just reflection on one’s own process, but also how one was convinced the process was the proper path to follow.

Chapter Four shows my grappling with the proper path while living in the outskirts of contingency. When I set out to perform my ethnography, I had grand plans. I hoped to interview two contingent faculty from every department who taught diversity courses. The number continued to dwindle as I found few contingent faculty had time to meet with me (or even answer my emails). Eventually, I talked to some instructors from the Chicana Studies, Theatre Studies, and Gender Studies Departments who shared with me their joys of teaching courses connected to at least one of their positionalities. As an instructor in the Department of Communication Studies, I also spent a lot of time with other faculty in this department because of our shared office space. My ethnographic process shifted from formal interviews with those outside my department to informal check-ins with those within it. It was within these between class check-ins with other contingent faculty in my department where I noticed how teaching GE diversity courses in a generalist program offers unique difficulties. Rather than having joy about shaping how students saw a specific part of their identity, these instructors moved from group to group to group while meeting the demands of students who did not enter the courses thinking they would be discussing power, privilege, and identity.

While the experiences of myself and others help get closer to understanding the multiple paths of contingent faculty in GE diversity courses, previous queer ethnographic work guides me to make this work less about ‘knowing’ and ‘categorizing’ and more about the process of trying

to know and categorize. David Valentine's *Imagining Transgender* (2007) is a good place to start. In this text, Valentine aims to better understand different parts of the trans community in New York City. He performs interviews in a few different spaces, including night clubs and non-profit organizations. Valentine uses his credibility as an HIV/AIDS community activist to encourage trans individuals to talk to him. He quickly realizes his scholarly perspective on the trans category was not the same perspective on the ground. Some individuals who might be categorized as trans do not really care about categories and others categorize themselves using different words.

Although Valentine's text starts out as a way to better understand what it means to be trans in certain spaces in New York City, he allows it to take the shape of an ethnography of the category itself. I incorporated this fluidity in a few ways. First, throughout my process, I allowed my interactions to guide me rather than my initial goals. Obviously, goals are good to start with, but I worked to be flexible enough to let others involved guide me in unexpected ways. Second, his focus on the category itself provides his work with openness and reflexivity that is not always found in ethnographic work. Rather than creating a conclusive project, he leaves loose ends for others to take up. He writes, "We may not be able to produce final answers (indeed, we should aim not to), but we can continue to expose questions productively in ways that engage with the concerns of one's study participants, political constituents, and fellow activists, even if we do not agree on what the finish line looks like – or even if there is one" (2007, 253).

Chapter Four interrogates the stickiness of contingency as it relates to producing research in a neoliberal climate. Although part of that chapter provides a glimpse into multiple perspectives of contingency, the main focus is how difficult it is to find time to do ethnographic research in a fast-paced, quantity-focused neoliberal world. During my ethnographic process, I had four

courses to deal with while also completing these interviews. It felt impossible to complete, but I realize this feeling of impossibility should be part of my ethnographic project. As a contingent faculty member, I was stuck in my position because I did not have time to do the research that might help me move up.

## **Keywords**

This chapter introduces keywords found throughout the rest of the dissertation. Each chapter picks up a unique thread in the overall argument of this dissertation, but they all rely on my usage of these keywords. In this section, I want to offer some explanation on why I chose these words and how these particular words function in multiple ways in the following chapters.

**Contingent.** When I started this project, I used the term ‘adjunct faculty’ to refer to myself and my colleagues. My choice to use ‘contingent faculty’ was shaped by a discussion with one of my colleagues<sup>1</sup> on the importance of naming us what we are rather than what we are not. If I use the term ‘adjunct,’ I suggest these faculty are supplemental rather than necessary to neoliberal academia. If I use the term ‘part-time,’ I am technically correct because that term is used in our contracts, but many of us labeled part-time teach more than the tenured and tenure-track faculty. I stuck with ‘contingent’ because our jobs are literally contingent on each semester’s budget.

I was also drawn to contingent because of how contingent academia is on us in order to maintain their neoliberal goals. Neoliberal academia cannot survive without contingent faculty. We offer them a large workforce for a fraction of the cost. We take on more work, so the other faculty can research. We teach multiple sections of GE courses to help the university meet its

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<sup>1</sup> This colleague offers more of this discussion in his text: “The Precarious New Faculty Majority: Communication and Instruction Research and Contingent Labor in Higher Education” by Darrin Murray published in *Communication Education* in April 2019.

education goals. We watch capacity of classes increase, at the detriment to our teaching goals. Although we have little say in administrative decisions, most of us stay in our positions because we (mostly) like what we do. At the same time, we are hanging on by a thread and, if the university is contingent on us, they need to take action.

Before moving to the next keyword, I should also note the other way contingency shows up throughout this work. As I explore multiple intersectional experiences, each experience is contingent on that particular day, in that particular class, with those particular circumstances. Intersectional experience alludes some researchers because there is no intersectional experience. Rather, there are experiences contingent to context. 'Contingent' means subject to chance. Contingent faculty are subject to chance with their position in neoliberal academia, but they are also subject to chance every time they enter a classroom or interact with a student.

**Precarity.** With so much of our position subjected to chance, it is no surprise I chose precarity as another keyword for this work. Precarity is the affective result of regularly being reminded that one's position depends on the availability of finances. Every semester a contingent faculty waits for their assignment and every semester this prolonged period of insecurity forces them to remember they have a job for now, but they do not know if they will have one next semester. And, typically, this wait occurs in the middle of a semester, when they need to put their best faces forward in hopes of receiving positive student evaluations.

Precarity also works in opposition with 'care' throughout the text. When one realizes their precarious position, they search for types of care. They look to their colleagues for support. They ask their union for guidance. They peer through the window before class in hopes of familiar, reassuring students. When they do not find what they need, they begin to wonder if

students and their better-off colleagues care. Sometimes, they sink deeper into their precarious feelings without the care they need.

While they search for care, some of them are also asked to teach students how to care. Specifically, GE diversity courses typically explore one or more precarious groups. Contingent faculty who teach these courses must navigate between their own precarious position, the precariousness of some of their students, and the precarious nature of the subject matter. At the same time, they have at least some investment in imploring their students to care about the precarious. It is difficult to show others how to care when working within a context that does not care.

**Diversity.** The final keyword threading through each chapter is diversity. This word is the one I struggled with the most. Before I settled on ‘diversity,’ I thought about using ‘multicultural,’ ‘comparative cultural studies,’ and ‘intersectional’ as descriptors for the GE courses in question. ‘Multicultural’ became too connected to earlier analyses of education and seemed a bit outdated. ‘Comparative cultural studies’ was too specific to the CSU system. ‘Intersectional’ just did not seem appropriate because, while I thought these courses should be intersectional, I could not guarantee this to be true without looking deeper into pedagogical choices and that was beyond the scope of this dissertation. I settled on ‘diversity’ because of my personal experience with the buzzword as a student. Adding to this, Sara Ahmed’s *On Being Included* (2012) sparked my interest in how diversity works and who does this work. The word felt right.

The choice of using ‘diversity’ brings attention to how diversity work seeks to include a variety of backgrounds, including ethnicity, class, gender, disability, sexuality, and so on. When a university uses diversity as a selling point, they highlight the multiple groups that are

represented in their students and faculty. They point to ethnic studies and gender studies departments as evidence of inclusion. They explain diversity as a way to be more well-rounded and, perhaps more importantly in neoliberal academia, a way to make better decisions in the workplace.

But, sometimes, the word felt wrong. As Ahmed notes, ‘diversity’ has turned into paperwork and box checking rather than the inclusion of voices. And, typically, the ones who make the university diverse are also the ones who do the diversity work. Ideally, diversity would include the interrogation of power and positionality. While some of us are doing this at the individual level, the treatment of faculty of color, contingent faculty, and/or other marginalized faculty show the university is not invested in this type of diversity work. I felt the emptiness of the word throughout this work, but that emptiness is important for the reader to feel. That emptiness is a sliver of the affective response to performing diversity work.

### **Layout of Dissertation**

While the e(a)ffects of neoliberal institutions on contingent faculty could be explored in a variety of ways, my interest lies in the way contingent faculty negotiate pressures of neoliberalism within GE diversity<sup>2</sup> courses. I have chosen GE diversity courses for two reasons. First, departments typically need more faculty to teach GE courses because students across campus must take these courses. This results in contingent faculty teaching a large portion of them. Second, those teaching these courses face the challenge of working with students who might not always see the need for the course, especially if those students believe the main goal of

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<sup>2</sup> Ideally, all courses would be diversity courses. For the purposes of this research, diversity courses include any course advertised by the General Education requirements as presenting the perspective of a marginalized group or groups. These courses include courses such as Intercultural Communication, Intro to Disability Studies, African American History in the United States, etc.

a college education is to get a career, which is likely in a neoliberal climate. Unlike a statistics or science course, diversity courses do not provide easily measurable skills, making it hard for students to understand how and when they might need these courses. In this section, I preview how this dissertation zeros in on the experience of contingent faculty in GE diversity courses. Through the digging into my experience and the experience of other contingent faculty, my research provides a missing piece to other research that shows the problem of contingent faculty exploitation. I spotlight the perspectives of those closest to this problem.

While this issue looks different depending on the university, I plan to focus on California State University, Northridge for a few reasons. First, CSUN administrators are currently grappling with CSU system-wide changes in GE diversity requirements. In 2018, Chancellor Timothy P. White issued these new requirements to allow smoother transfers for students who move from one CSU to another. He also rationalized the change because it might increase graduation rates and address achievement gaps across CSUs. Unlike most other CSUs, CSUN had required two diversity courses<sup>3</sup> before Chancellor White's order. The new system requirements limit the possibility of having these two required courses at CSUN. After campus-wide protests by students and faculty, CSUN administrators attempted to accommodate diversity courses in other parts of the GE curriculum in order to prevent this change from having a large impact on departments such as Gender and Women's Studies and Chicano/Chicana Studies. They began transitioning to the new GE requirements in the fall of 2019, but with the CSU recent approval of a requirement of an ethnic studies course for all students, the GE diversity requirements are still in flux. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter Two.

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<sup>3</sup> As of March 9, 2019, the CSUN diversity GE courses are labeled as 'Comparative Cultural Studies.' They include courses such as Asian American Women, Gender and Media, Perspectives in Queer Studies, and Cities of the Developing World.

Second, CSUN administrators are also dealing with COVID-19 budget cuts which place pressure on chairs to negotiate how and if they can provide contingent with the workload levels contingent faculty expect. These negotiations include increases in class sizes and decreases in course offerings. My work offers a way to see how contingent faculty work toward creating a positive learning environment for the students while trying to maintain a care-centered environment for themselves despite the changes. Finally, my position as a contingent faculty member at CSUN provides me with the possibility of building trust with my interviewees, or at least more so than if I were to attempt this research at other universities. My experience at this university pushed me towards doing this research because I want CSUN to become an even better environment for students and faculty. This effort to build trust coincides with the feminist ethics attached to feminist ethnography.

Chapter One expands on the theoretical framework discussed previously in this introduction. This chapter reveals more about how Foucault sees homo economicus forming in the context of neoliberalism in the United States. It also adds Wendy Brown's (2015) thoughts on homo economicus in the more recent climate of the 2010s. Then, it shifts to precarity through the lens of Lorey and Judith Butler. Finally, it supplements these ideas with the important ethical foundation of intersectionality noted in the work of Patricia Hill Collins and other feminists of color.

Before getting into these experiences, it is necessary to understand the evolution of neoliberal academia in the United States as well as within the California higher education system. In Chapter Two, I explain this evolution. A neoliberal institution prioritizes the needs of the consumers (in this case, students) over the needs of others (faculty) in the institution. Henry Giroux (2010) believes these conditions eliminate the agency of all involved in them. In this



chapter, I historicize the neoliberal institution on a macro scale as well as on the meso and micro scale by showing how tenured and tenure track faculty members are influenced by these institutions. I also discuss ways the neoliberal institution seeks to capitalize on diversity to the detriment of faculty and students, especially those who are marginalized. Jodi Melamed (2011) describes this as neoliberal multiculturalism. I shift to the limited research on contingent faculty and their experience. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a narrow focus on neoliberal academia in California.

After providing this framework, I move into the autoethnographic portion of the dissertation. In Chapter Three, I illustrate my experience as a contingent faculty who teaches multiple GE diversity courses each semester and who struggles with anxiety and depression, among other invisible disabilities. As a form of therapy, I began writing about my teaching experiences in a journal in 2018. I utilize my journal entries to help me reflect and write on my experience in this chapter. I weave some of these reflections with my theoretical and emotional interpretations of my experience throughout this chapter. Since intersectionality grounds all of my research, I spend some time explaining how different aspects of my identity (working-class, person with invisible disabilities, white) might shape my experience, both emotionally and affectively.

Chapter Four moves to exploring the experience of other contingent faculty. According to the CSUN Human Resources Department, in 2017-2018, contingent faculty made up fifty-eight percent of instructional faculty at CSUN. Of these contingent faculty, twenty-five percent are faculty of color and fifty-two percent are women. With this chapter, I show ways different positionalities affect a faculty's feeling about their experience in a GE diversity course and academia as a whole. At the same time, this chapter takes a life of its own as it becomes an exploration of the stickiness of contingency. When one is contingent in neoliberal academia,

there is not much time to do research, but one needs to do research if they want to dissolve the adhesive that pulls at them. I describe the feeling of impossibility in this experience.

Originally, I had planned to interview contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses in twenty-seven departments ranging from Music to American Indian Studies to Business Law for Chapter Four. However, it is probably not surprising that I had trouble persuading contingent faculty to respond. Eventually, I interviewed 20 contingent faculty members from departments such as Gender and Women's Studies and Chicano Studies, but, to my frustration, most of my interviewees came from my own department of Communication Studies. Instead of defeat, I used this directional shove as a way to explore how contingent faculty in a department that might not be considered a 'diversity' department tackles these courses.

My tentative research questions can be found in the Appendix. But, like with most of this chapter, my plans went out the window as I navigated how to include as many contingent faculty as possible. I always spent time with those included in my research to introduce them to my project and to ask them preliminary questions. However, after those initial interviews, check-ins ranged from five-minute chats to emails to long-winded rants about our days. My primary goal with this chapter is to de-center myself and to show the value of the experience of other contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses, highlighting how things like race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and experience in academia play a role in the way these courses influence their mental well-being. While this chapter does achieve this primary goal, it also serves as an interrogation of the ethnographic process as a contingent faculty in neoliberal academia.

Chapter Five focuses on a small learning group formed between me and other contingent faculty in my department in 2020. During this year, we had all transitioned from face-to-face to

online learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic. A little later in the year, after the police killings of multiple Black people including Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, people all over the world began demanding the world change to a place that recognized Black and Brown individuals as equal to everyone else. In response to this, our department chair, a Black, queer, woman, sent an email calling faculty to action in whatever way they saw fit. After I saw a contingent faculty member respond with interest in doing something, I began coordinating with others on some ideas for contingent faculty to take action.

A handful of people responded, and we decided to start a book group that uses each book we are reading to guide us in planning our future courses. Since each of us were spread throughout Los Angeles County (and beyond) and we were in a pandemic, we held these meetings through Zoom. This book club became a way to hold each other accountable in other ways. For example, we all agreed our efforts should not stop with the book club, so we ended each meeting with some ways each of us took action outside of the book club. We also created an online living document that serves as teaching resources for other faculty. Our formation called to mind the concept of emergent strategy developed by adrienne maree brown (2018). This concept bolsters every day, seemingly small actions as things that matter for activist work. Although I did not start this club with the intention of including it in my dissertation, I began to see how our discussions about how news going on outside of the classroom influences our actions in the classroom related to the way diversity work should be done in academia. I saw it as a small step in recognizing our interdependence on each other and the outside world. We began to collapse the walls built by neoliberalism. This is what adrienne maree brown hopes for as she develops her concept of emergent strategy. This chapter captures the blossoming of potential within our department.

I hope to use this small book club, and this entire dissertation, as a foundation for disruption of the current neoliberal climate in academia. Currently, this system uses faculty in precarious conditions to sell a brand of diversity that very few faculty and students recognize. Upon completion of this dissertation, I hope other see survival tactics from contingent faculty to help in their unique situations. I also hope some departments and institutions suggestions use my work to show contingent faculty they care. One goal of neoliberal academic institutions is to prepare students for their careers. Perhaps it is time to show students how a neoliberal world impacts those who work within it.

## Chapter One – Homo Economicus, Precarity, and Intersectionality: The Molding of a Contingent Diversity Workforce

After getting settled into my dorm, I quickly set out to control my anxiety about this new experience. I did not have anyone to warn me about what the transition might be like and none of my friends from high school were there to lean on. So, I did what I had been trained to do since I was 10: I looked for work. Even though I was taking a full-course load, my first thought to manage my anxiety was to find a job because, as I reflect back on this now, as long as I had money to survive, everything else would be fine. Soon, I found a job in the periodical section of the library, where I waited for patrons to check out books or ask me questions. Since this was pre-Internet-at-your-fingertips days, it was a pretty boring job. Compared to my previous jobs (cashier at McDonald's, labeler at a warehouse), it was not work. But, it was the way I tied myself to the university. Rather than look for clubs to join or events to attend, I chose to work as my entry point to the university community.

Even with the choice to focus my dissertation on my job, I have chosen work as my entry point to community. Work makes me feel safe. This should not be surprising. As someone who grew up in a home that teetered between working class and poor, precarity burrowed itself into my brain years ago. As it relates to teaching GE diversity courses while contingent, economic precarity might influence how I teach these courses, but, as this chapter shows, precarity is not only economic. For example, the precarity that comes with discussing Black Lives Matter protests while being Black and contingent is not one I will ever feel. I will also never feel the precarity that comes with being openly trans in the classroom while discussing the possibility of being discriminated against in the workplace for a trans identity. Throughout the rest of the dissertation, I attempt to show how precarity influences contingent faculty differently. Before

doing so, I need to consider questions of precarity: How might neoliberalism mold precarious bodies? How might those within this system understand themselves? What might play a role in their understanding of themselves? In this chapter, I discuss precarity as an affective state related to temporal and spatial experience. To that end, I begin with explaining Michel Foucault's homo economicus as it relates to the unique context of neoliberalism in the United States before shifting to work on precarity by Judith Butler and Isabell Lorey. Since precarity is tied to intersectional identity, the second half of this chapter explores work on identity as it relates to time and space of neoliberalism as well as scholarship on intersectionality. Although it rarely looks the same for everyone, precarity is a condition of neoliberalism in the United States.

### **The Affective Molding of Neoliberal Bodies**

A neoliberal system values individualism more than interdependence. It lays the groundwork for private industry to succeed while denigrating unions who represent people working in these industries. It spins lies of meritocracy as individuals struggle to move up the socioeconomic ladder. Neoliberalism molds those within it into neoliberal subjects who rationalize their lives based on cost/benefit analysis. This section offers an explanation of the molding process. In the first subsection, I start with Michel Foucault's lectures in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1979) where he discusses how neoliberalism formed a new type of homo economicus, or a body that rationalizes through one's entrepreneurialism. Then, I look to Wendy Brown's (2015) expansion on Foucault's understanding of the neoliberal impact on rationalization and dialogue. In the second subsection, I move to work on precarious bodies, including those from Judith Butler (2004) and Isabell Lorey (2015). These two subsections work together to illustrate the tension between an individual's understanding of their economic usefulness and their vulnerability in a neoliberal system.

## *Homo Economicus*

In the months of 1978 and 1979, French philosopher Michel Foucault presented a number of lectures at the Collège de France. Eventually collected into a book called *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1979), this lecture series delves into the government's role on shaping the rationality of subjects. In the lecture presented on March 14, 1979, Foucault considers the ways US neoliberalism is uniquely different to European neoliberalism. Foucault's consideration offers important context to this dissertation's limited scope of US neoliberal academia. Since liberalism is at the core of values in the United States, he believes it always finds itself "at the heart of all political debate" in the country (217). He writes, "Liberalism in America is a whole way of being and thinking. It is a type of relation between the governors and the governed, much more than a technique of governors with regard to the governed" (218).

With liberalism at its core, the United States stands as fertile ground for a new conceptualization of this economic system. Foucault believes one important way neoliberalism differs from liberalism and other classical economic theories is the way they understand human capital. Rather than look at human capital in an abstract, procedural way, neoliberals view human capital by examining how individuals choose to do their work. He states, "So it is no longer the analysis of the historical logic of processes; it is the analysis of internal rationality, the strategic programming of individuals' activity" (223). Neoliberals bring attention to the 'how' of work to, in turn, figure out how much each type of work deserves to be compensated. Foucault identifies this shift as the moment when the worker moves from an object of economic analysis to an active economic subject.

According to Foucault, this active economic subject creates a type of homo economicus that differs from classical conceptualization of an economic man who exchanges with others.

Instead, the neoliberal homo economicus is an entrepreneur of oneself, “being for himself his own capital, being of himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings” (226). Of course, the entrepreneur’s worth depends on the value society places upon them.

Foucault discusses the way genetic make-up might influence how much a worker can make because of diseases they might inherit. Although he does not give it much consideration, he also suggests society could easily allow race to play a role in this. Adding to these forms of discrimination, one might also consider the (in)visibility of the work being done, both in the places one might work as well as what actually receives recognition as work.

Four decades later, scholars continue to theorize on the macro and micro effects of neoliberalism. In *Undoing Demo*, Wendy Brown (2015) recognizes the difficulty in pinning down these effects because local contexts provide different ways for neoliberalism to show itself. As she narrows down her focus, Brown describes the debilitating effects neoliberalism has on democracies in particular. She provides four consequences of neoliberalism on democratic states. First, she believes neoliberalism intensifies inequality leading to a smaller middle class and less chance of upward mobility. Second, she sees a “crass or unethical commercialization of things and activities considered inappropriate for marketization” (29). She provides a broad range of examples, such as fracking, organ-trafficking, and pollution rights. Of course, education is included in this as well. Third, she identifies an increasing partnership between business and the state. Fourth, she believes neoliberalism creates economic havoc, destabilizing and dramatically impacting the market in a variety of ways.

Brown describes these consequences as major issues affecting democracy, so she believes it is important to explore how the consequences of neoliberalism shift normative ways of reasoning on individuals within democratic countries. According to Brown, neoliberalism



impacts a democracy's ability to function because of its molding of the state and the subject. She writes, "...both persons and states are expected to comport themselves in ways that maximize their capital value in the present and enhance future value, and both persons and states do so through practices of entrepreneurialism, self-investment, and/or attracting investors" (22). This shift forces the subject to think of themselves in economic terms. Brown recognizes that previous forms of capitalism produce a similar shift, but neoliberalism sculpts a whole new type of homo economicus. The neoliberal economicus: (1) views itself in ONLY economic terms, no other, (2) works toward increasing its economic value through competition with other bodies, and (3) moves from a focus on productive value found in the previous version of homo economicus to financial capital.

Much of Brown's conceptualization of the neoliberal homo economicus comes from Michel Foucault's *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures discussed at the beginning of this subsection. Brown contends Foucault did not go far enough in these lectures. She offers her addition to his perspective on the formation of the neoliberal subject by suggesting Foucault probably agrees with her but did not make the points she expands on quite clear. For Brown, homo economicus operates in all parts of society, not just the economic. Adding to this, she believes neoliberal rationalization leads to the diminishing of homo politicus (the political subject). As this diminishes, a subject cannot engage in the dialogues necessary for a thriving democratic society. Of course, this affects the political system in the United States, but it also has dangerous consequences to the way subjects approach those with different perspectives. For example, a neoliberal subject, student or instructor, might have a difficult time operating when asked to participate in a discussion about gender, race, sexuality, or a variety of positionalities because

they will only be considering the economic benefit for themselves. This is an important crux for understanding how I, and others, operate in neoliberal academia.

When teaching GE diversity courses, I feel what seems like a tension between homo economicus and homo politicus. As a contingent faculty member, I cannot help but consider how my choices might influence my job prospects in the next semester. At the same time, the optimist in me pushes me to try to have the difficult and necessary conversations with my students. As these students continue to grow into their understanding of communication in a democratic country, they must practice having tough conversations. In later chapters, I explore ways others negotiate this tension in more detail. Brown's and Foucault's notion of the neoliberal subject helps with this, but I also think an understanding of precarity provides a glimpse into ways a subject moves their body as well as how they identify their reasons for moving.

#### *The Limits and Possibilities of Precarity*

Thus far, I have offered the homo economicus body as one that understands itself in relation to economic productivity in a neoliberal society who, because of this focus on productivity, might not find engaging in difficult conversations, including those conversations that might take place in a GE diversity course, to be worth their time. Related to this struggle is an individual's understanding of their precarious position in society, as well as their awareness of the precarious position of others. If one is exhausted because of worry about their security, it might not be in their interest to engage in the classroom. In GE diversity courses, precarity underlies all discussions of power dynamics in society, even if the word is never mentioned throughout the course. An individual's awareness of precarity within society impacts whether they can engage in these conversations, whether they care enough to engage in these

conversations with those who are different than them, and whether dialogue in the classroom might impact their concern about the rest of the world.

With her book *Precarious Lives*, Judith Butler (2004) seeks to better understand how individuals become molded into conceptualizing their precarity. She mulls precarity through the aftermath of 9/11, specifically the way Muslims were treated in the United States in response to the attacks. To this end, she asks the questions, “Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what makes a grievable life?” (20). She identifies loss as an affect that brings individuals together if for no other reason than everyone has felt loss at some point in their lives. She writes, “Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure” (20). To a certain extent, individuals are all vulnerable to each other as they become more connected. Someone might say the wrong thing and cause their employer to lose a client. Someone might make a racist statement in a classroom, pushing others to stop showing up. Someone might call the police because they feel threatened, leading to the police officer shooting an individual because they seemed suspicious. As she considers how societies become more concerned about the vulnerability of some more than others, she suggests social and political conditions in a society capitalize on loss and grief in order to make it acceptable to stop caring about, and sometimes inflict violence on, others.

Although 9/11 is a different context than neoliberal academia, this idea of using affect to inflict violence on another group shows itself in many parts of society, including academia. Later in the text, Butler mentions ways society schematizes what it means to be human. Not only does the normative scheme work to produce some humans as more human than others, society also produces “images of the less than human, in the guise of the human, to show how the less than

human disguises itself, and threatens to deceive those of us who might think we recognize another human there, in that face” (146), causing a society to mistrust this particular group of people. Butler continues by mentioning those groups that receive “no image, no name, no narrative, so that there never was a life, and there never was a death.” (146). These normative schemes shape which vulnerable groups society should care about and which do not matter.

In her introduction to Isabell Lorey’s *State of Insecurity* (2014), Butler calls security an affective investment of the subject. Subjects invest in security at the expense of other affective investments, including the feeling of community, care, and mental wellbeing. Lorey’s text interrogates the neoliberal systems as one that dominates through precarity. She writes,

“Precarization is not an exception, it is rather the rule. It is spreading even in those areas that were long considered secure. It has become an instrument of governing and, at the same time, a basis for capitalist accumulation that serves social regulation and control” (2).

In this system that thrives on precarity, subjects become obsessed with protecting themselves. But protecting themselves from what? To answer this question, Lorey breaks down three dimensions of the precarious. She takes the first from Butler’s notions described above. In this dimension, precariousness is a shared, relational experience that brings people together, such as loss or grief. In the second dimension, which she calls precarity, the government and other systems begin to create a hierarchy of precarity. Through the schematization described in the previous paragraph, this hierarchy provides an ‘other’ to scapegoat. The third dimension finds the government not simply shaping the ‘other,’ but also shaping the precarious subject. In this dimension, the subject begins to understand the particular security measures that must be taken in order to make the subject feel safe. Lorey believes this process convinces subjects that they

should be threatened by those who are different from them rather than the neoliberal system. The subject does not need to focus on the cruelty of their optimism when they are wrapped up in feeling safe from others.

As these normative schemes shape how subjects see and care for others, they concurrently shape the subject. Since Lorey spends less time on this, I want to make a short pivot to Laurent Berlant's notion of cruel optimism to show one affective result of this subjective molding. Berlant (2011) understands this notion as a subject's tendency to be tied to some object of hope that serves as an obstacle to achieving the goal that should come with obtaining this object. For example, some might believe buying a house might make them happy, but after purchasing the house they might find there is so much remodeling to be done on the house that they never achieve the happiness that should have come with the purchase. Of the experience of this optimism, she writes, "...the *affective structure* of optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that *this* time, nearness to *this* thing will help you or a world become different in just the right way" (2). As they seek out this different way, they bind themselves to the process of cruel optimism, making it almost impossible to escape the search for the right way. Berlant uses examples such as romantic love or upward mobility. For many, these goals never come true, but as one works toward each one (through their routines, choice of living, their careers, etc.), they cannot escape the binding if (or when) they realize they cannot obtain their goals.

In order to explore cruel optimism in more detail, Berlant looks to precarity of the neoliberal system. She describes precarity as a situation where a subject's life is in someone else's hands. While she recognizes precarity's existence in all capitalist activity, she believes neoliberal conditions exacerbate this issue. She describes the process as "...a neoliberal feedback

loop, with its efficiency at distributing and shaping the experience of insecurity throughout the class structure and across the globe” (192-193). As one becomes more financially insecure, they are encouraged to fall into the homo economicus trap, thinking of ways they can financially improve their standings in society. A personal example of this would be my experience in neoliberal academia. By attending college (for way too many years), I had some sort of hope that upward mobility would be possible. Compared to my childhood, I might be slightly better off economically, but the happiness, or security, that was supposed to happen never came. I am still consumed with paying my bills and keeping my job.

Berlant’s cruel optimism speaks to the logics of subjects within a neoliberal society. They hold out hope that we will no longer feel precarious, that they will finally be happy, safe, and content for what might feel like their whole lives. Lorey believes neoliberal subjects possess a logic of precarity while societies *should* be working towards a logic of care that takes into account affective and communicative work that are not easily recognized in a neoliberal world of homo economic bodies. A shift towards this type of logic shows value to the work subjects to do help each other feel better despite their precarity. She calls for a ‘care strike’ where care does not stop, but, instead, is pushed to the forefront of the neoliberalism. This moves the feminized, privatized work of affect and communication into the public, forcing a dialogue about an overlooked necessity of society. She does not call for care to be incorporated into neoliberalism. Instead, she hopes a dialogue on the importance of care work might create a shift on what individuals deem as important to keep society functioning.

After dialogue, Lorey is optimistic that an increased focus on care would lead to individuals seeing the interrelatedness of their precarity rather than seeing their positions as driving each other apart. Of precarity, Lorey writes, “It remains undefined, specifically because

it always exists in relation to others and is thus constantly linked to social and political possibilities of action” (100). If individuals begin to see the invisible affective and communicative care work performed as a way reduce feelings of precarity, they might also be able to reframe how they see others. Through this reframe, Lorey sees the possibility of a ‘monster precariat,’ a group of precarious people who join forces to demand change in a society that thrives off of their precariousness.

Sara Ahmed’s *Willful Subjects* (2014) illustrates what this monster precariat might look like on a micro level. As with the other scholarship in this section, Ahmed describes a subject’s dependency on a system. And, much like Berlant, she explores how this dependency relates to feelings of happiness. She believes parts of a system cooperate to make a system function. Unfortunately, the system only performs the will of some parts of it, making some subjects less willing to participate in the creation of the system. Those who see their will as satisfied in the system are happy, or at the very least content. But some are not and because of that they are “unwilling to preserve an idea of happiness” for everyone else (2). Those subjects who are not as willing to participate become willful subjects, viewed as negative because they disrupt the continuation of the system.

Labor becomes important to her understanding of the willful subject. She believes a subject’s labor position predetermines how they can help the system. The system does not allow a subject in one labor position to move into a different type of labor. Adding to this, a subject’s role is to maximize the efficiency of the system. So, they are expected to do whatever it takes to make the system continue to function without costing the system more. Again, homo economicus shows itself here, telling the subject to maximize themselves in order to maximize the system. Equally important though is if a subject does not believe they are doing what is economically

necessary for themselves and they try to do something different, they become the willful subject. The one who puts a cog in the system.

Similar to Lorey, Ahmed believes the willful, or those who are no longer interested in living a precarious life silently, might be able to come together over this shared affect in order to care about each other. She writes, “If willfulness is a politics that aims for no, then it is a politics that is not only about the refusal to be supporting limbs but the refusal of a social body that treats others as supporting limbs” (195). Through this support of each other she sees the possibility of the formation of an army. A force that shapes whose needs are met by the system. A monster precariat that blocks the system from moving forward without reckoning with their precarious positions. Later chapters of this dissertation cannot offer a monster precariat, but they do show how some who are precarious might be moving towards precarious coalitions of care.

### **Intersectionality**

The previous section shows neoliberalism’s impact on bodies, especially as it relates to feelings of precarity. As I consider precarity as an experience of contingent faculty, I also must recognize how different positionalities might impact these feelings. To that end, I supplement my understanding of the precarious neoliberal subject with intersectionality. I start this exploration with Kimberlé Crenshaw’s work on intersectionality (1989; 1991). Despite criticisms that this is an overplayed choice (Collins and Bilge, 2016; Collins, 2019), as a white woman in an environment where non-white women do not always receive the credit they deserve, I see this choice as necessary. Those familiar with Black feminism, Chicana feminism, transnational feminism, or any feminism that does not center whiteness realize that intersectionality did not begin with Crenshaw’s work. Despite this, her work serves as a valuable place to begin, if only because she gave the idea that gender operates within a system of other oppressions a name that



became academically recognized. After exploring her scholarship, I turn to Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, two scholars who expand on ways scholars might use and understand intersectionality.

In 1989 piece called “Demarginalizing the Intersections of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Doctrine,” Kimberlé Crenshaw presented her thoughts on how antidiscrimination law, as well as anti-racist and feminist work, excluded black women because of their single-axis approach to societal issues. She believes this approach not only limits the way society views discrimination, but, importantly, this single axis framework “...erases Black women in the conceptualization, identification, and remediation of race and sex discrimination by limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise privileged members of the group” (140). In other words, those who hope to solve issues of discrimination but who focus on only a small group of an entire population, create solutions that only help this small group. Crenshaw suggests the creation of an entirely rethought framework that allows for a multi-axis approach to discrimination. This multi-axis approach would come to be known as intersectionality.

Crenshaw explores intersectionality with “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” (1991). With this work, Crenshaw provides an important criticism of identity politics. Crenshaw recognizes how identity politics provides empowerment for marginalized communities who deal with violence, while at the same time creating confusion and frustration for those within these marginalization communities who might not identify with others within them. According to Crenshaw, the problem of violence against women is shaped as much by categories such as class and race as it is by gender. Women who live in different intersections begin to see difference within the category of ‘woman.’ Crenshaw

writes, "...ignoring difference within groups contributes to tension among groups..." (1242). She believes that when individuals must choose between the identity of one or another group (for example, gender or being non-white), those who cannot choose are pushed to "a location that resists telling" (1242). Crenshaw uses this piece to tell the story of some of these women pushed to this location. With my focus on contingent faculty (a group pushed to the margins), this dissertation provides the opportunity for those who find themselves at multiple intersections to share their experience, highlighting commonalities and differences between each other.

After more than 15 years of the term intersectionality in circulation, Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016) attempt to pin down the what and how of intersectionality in their book *Intersectionality (Key Concepts)*. They begin by recognizing the heterogeneous nature of intersectionality. In fact, they see this as a valuable tenet of the concept. They spend most of their book exploring ways intersectionality works as an analytical tool. According to Collins and Bilge, intersectionality provides the opportunity to explore power relations via their intersections (such as racism and sexism), but also across domains of power, including structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal (28). This opportunity aligns with the call of feminist ethnographers who hope to explore both the individual and the systemic and how these two things relate to each other and those around them.

Similar to Crenshaw's early work on intersectionality, Collins and Bilge explore the way identity and identity politics influences the utilization of the tool. While they do not disagree with Crenshaw's notions that identity politics might lead to divisions within marginalized populations, they emphasize the possibility intersectionality provides for those who seek others who share some similar, but not exactly the same, struggles. Within these commonalities, but also these differences, Collins and Bilge believe there is possibility for transformation. They use

the transnational feminist term transformative identity politics to explain this notion.

Intersectionality provides an opportunity for individuals to understand their own identity in relational terms, through the tension between cultural, systemic, and disciplinary tensions, as well as the interpersonal tensions that take place within different identity groups.

Intersectionality might be especially useful in order to explore the layers of tensions building in neoliberal academia. In her work “Undoing Intersectionality,” Bilge (2013) writes, “Framing social life not as collective, but as the interaction of individual social entrepreneurs, neoliberalism denies preconditions leading to structural inequalities; in consequence, it congratulates itself for dismantling policies and discrediting movements concerned with structures of injustice” (407). She goes on to write that the use of intersectionality within the framework of neoliberalism results in a “diluted, disciplined, and disarticulated” that works against the founding conceptions of the tool (407). Intersectionality becomes another piece of the neoliberal brand, a piece that helps the individual become more valuable, but it is not used to shape the community.

To expand on ways neoliberal academia might exploit intersectionality, she focuses on a concept she calls academic disciplinary feminism. This feminism spends some of its time talking about metatheoretical issues. Specifically for intersectionality, disciplinary feminists focus on what is and is not intersectional rather than doing intersectional work. Part of Bilge’s disappointment with this type of feminism is that they seek to control a tool that is not meant to be controlled. Not only this, but they also end up whitening intersectionality. When trying to pin down intersectionality, they look to previous feminist work to illustrate how other (white) feminists had intersectionality in mind all along. Whether this is true or not, Bilge finds this hugely frustrating because Black feminism is at the core of intersectionality. Bilge states this

clearly in both of the works above, but, as also mentioned, one can also see explicit calls for attention to the race/gender/class axis by many other Black women. Academic disciplinary feminist attempt to control and whiten intersectionality.

Patricia Hill Collins (2019) shares similar concerns about the directions some scholars take when using intersectionality. Her first concern focuses on the neutralization of the social justice possibilities attached to intersectionality. After exploring the trajectory of intersectionality through scholars ranging from Anna Julia Cooper, Gloria Anzaldua, and, of course, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Collins suggests social justice is an important element of intersectional scholarship. However, she notices some recent intersectional scholars overlook social justice. She likens this to ways other fields, such as cultural studies, African American studies, and feminist studies became institutionalized by academia, taking the sting out of the critical nature of at least parts of their foundational work.

Collins worries this neutralization might prevent the reformative and transformative possibilities of intersectionality. Collins describes reformist projects as those that seek to solve a social problem that leaves the system intact. A reformist project taking on neoliberal academia might hope to eliminate reliance on contingent faculty while keeping other parts of the system the same. On the other hand, she writes, "...transformative projects see specific social systems themselves as both the cause of specific problems and problems in their own right" (Collins, 81). A transformative project hopes to completely shift the way neoliberal academia works, ranging from the reliance on contingent faculty to the overabundance of administrative faculty to the view of students as consumers. Collins sees intersectionality as a work in progress, one that can be reformist or transformative (or both). I see this dissertation as reformative in nature, but on its way to making transformative change in the system.

Although Collins believes it is important for intersectionality to be open and flexible to ways scholars use it, she also thinks it is necessary to pin down important elements of the concept before academia takes hold and controls (neutralizes) its potential. She offers six core constructs to guide intersectional scholars: relationality, power, a rethinking of social inequality, social context, complexity, and social justice. Relationality offers a way out of the binary framework many parts of academia rely on. Binary frameworks tend to focus on difference or sameness. According to Collins, a relational approach to difference recognizes "...distinctions, yet seek[s] patterns of connection among entities that are understood as different. For relational difference, the challenge lies in uncovering points of connection, overlap, or intersection (e.g., men and women may be different but their gender experiences are interconnected)" (218). As I consider my experience and the experiences of others who are contingent faculty, I hope to identify where some of these intersections show themselves.

Power as a core construct calls attention to the different positionalities within one individual. Collins believes that pointing to aspects of one's identity without considering how power plays a role in it is non-intersectional. Adding to this, she writes, "Intersectionality posits that systems of power co-produce one another in ways that reproduce both unequal material outcomes and the distinctive social experiences that characterize people's experiences within social hierarchies" (46). This understanding of power seeps into her conceptualization of a rethinking of social inequality as another core construct. Through the recognition of power's role in creating inequality, she believes intersectional scholars reject perspectives that suggest inequality is inevitable. Intersectional work views inequality as the result of power dynamics that, when brought to the forefront, can be shifted.

Collins also points out social context as a core construct. By emphasizing this, she highlights a few important points. First, the interpretative communities we engage with define how we understand the production of knowledge. For example, an activist might see the world differently than a life-long academic. Second, the current state of the world shapes the way we understand each other. Finally, on an individual level, power dynamics within relationships affect the way we interact with each other. Complexity, another core construct, provides guidance on how to take into account social context. Intersectional scholars assume complexity in our projects because an attention to multiple social categories cannot be anything except complex. Because of this, Collins calls for innovative strategies of investigation, without which one cannot begin to tease out complexity.

When discussing social justice as the sixth core component, Collins explains an intersectional scholar's ethics must be supported with the goal of social justice in mind. Without social justice, a project might appear intersectional because of the focus on different aspects of identity, but then lead to the creation (or reinforcement) of a hierarchical system. Collins writes, "Uncoupling intersectionality from its commitment to social justice might garner academic legitimation for intersectionality, but it might also undermine the integrity of intersectionality's *critical inquiry*" (275, italics author's own). Collins uses eugenics as an example. She explains eugenics projects identify intersecting aspects of different identities in order to convince society that some groups are better than others, and, therefore, some groups deserve to live and others do not. Some groups deserve care and others do not.

For this project, Collins's emphasis on social justice informs my focus on the collective good rather than individual need. Collins believes this commitment to collective good is often

overlooked by the secular ethics academia values in reference to freedom of speech. Of this, she writes:

“My sense is that academia does not lack a commitment to ethics. Rather, it has been more committed to a secular ethics that emphasizes the goal of protecting individual rights at the expense of protecting the rights of groups and communities. Secular ethics are vital for upholding freedom of speech for individuals, which underlies the free exchange of ideas. Such ethics are essential for critical analysis itself. I value the protections that free speech provides for my own intellectual work. Yet I also wonder whether a secular ethics that valorizes individual rights over the collective needs of communities can ever be enough.”

For this project, the tension between secular ethics and intersectional ethics with an emphasis on social justice is constant, both when handling difficult subjects in the classroom and considering how contingent faculty help each other handle these issues.

### **The Impact of Time and Space on the Precarious**

Before concluding this chapter, I want to focus on how the time and space within a neoliberal system might be especially pertinent to consider in relation to neoliberal academia. While all the scholarship previously discussed alludes to this thought, time and space have such an influence on how I understand neoliberal academia that I cannot conclude without turning my attention there. This also serves as a nice transition to a focus on the history of neoliberal academia in the next chapter.

In the previous chapter, Sara Ahmed’s *On Being Included* (2012) offered some foundation on the diversity work and the pressure on marginalized groups to do this work. Her book *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) broadens the focus to illustrate how spaces influence the way individuals

move through the world. Familiarity is of special importance in this text. A space might become familiar to some after spending a certain amount of time in it, allowing their body to expand into it while the space impresses upon the body. Ahmed primarily focuses on the way sexuality and race might affect this familiarity. For example, as someone who is white, I might have an easier time forming familiarity within a space created by an institution with whiteness as one of its foundations. Individuals who walk into an unfamiliar normative space become disoriented. As one becomes disoriented, they typically work to reorient themselves. If this reorientation is not possible, some individuals might work to make the space less disorienting for them or more disorienting for others. As Ahmed shows in *On Being Included*, an academic who needs to reorient themselves on a regular basis might become exhausted by this process.

Ahmed also explores ways one's (dis)ability might influence this familiarity, explicitly focusing on physical ability. Using her ideas of the ways normative spaces influence ways bodies move through them, Chapter Three shows how the fluctuation of my mental and cognitive disabilities might add another layer to understanding normative space. My mental and cognitive disabilities fluctuate, which leaves me in a regular state of disorientation. Sometimes, I work to adapt by, for example, masking these difficulties to make the students feel as if everything is normal. Other times, I cannot mask them, and they come out in a multitude of ways, including, if I am especially anxious or depressed, the pace of the class. Or, my dyslexia shows itself when I spell something wrong on the board because I am not being careful enough. Ahmed believes as more individuals become disoriented, society might open up what they understand to be a livable life. I hope my (lack of) adaptation illustrates some of these possibilities. In Chapter Four, the other contingent faculty I engage with provide even more ways of understanding what this adaptability might look like through the lens of their intersectional experiences.



These experiences might also be affected by time. To fill in some gaps on temporality, I want to turn to Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds* (2010). In this text, she focuses on the body's relationship to time. She describes this relationship as a bind between the body and the productive requirements of capitalism. She calls this process chrononormativity, or "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity" (3). The historical imprint left on a body because of the development of capitalism limits their sense of belonging and acceptance. As academia becomes more focused on moving students through the system rather than allowing them to take the time to learn about multiple fields and perspectives, students and instructors might become less accommodating to others. For example, I have witnessed students who share a classroom with others who process things in a different way (and have to ask multiple questions during class) end up whispering to each other or rolling their eyes. And instructors who engage with time in a slower way than expected will be looked as misplaced.

Freeman explores ways historical apprehension about queer pleasures, such as drag performances, push for the encountering, witnessing, and transforming of history. They encourage some to pay attention, but they also allow those who participate in them to have agency in their own representations. After discussing these representations, Freeman suggests they might do the work of unbinding bodies from the productive requirements of capitalism. She writes, "...unbinding time and/from history means recognizing how erotic relations and the bodily acts that sustain them gum up the works of the normative structures we call family and nation, gender, race, class, and sexual identity, by changing tempos, by remixing memory and desire, by recapturing excess" (173). It seems this unbinding process creates the possibility of new orientations to objects and bodies. These types of new orientations are what I had hoped to

find in my research. Some contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses try to open up space for different temporal engagements, attempting to provide new orientations to those who have normative engagements with time. If an activity takes too long, instructors might feel the impatience of their students. On another note, some faculty who operate within the non-normative temporal experience might accidentally push students into new orientations. Whether purposeful or on accident, it is important to hear from contingent faculty how time influences their position, including what specific elements (positionality, time constraints, too many students, etc.) might prevent some from creating these new orientations.

Ahmed's and Freeman's work provide important considerations of how space and time contribute to one's understanding of their experience. To illustrate an example of this, I want to focus on Cindy Cruz's work "Toward an Epistemology of a Brown Body" (2001). In this piece, she reflects on how the bodies of mothers and grandmothers serve as informants for Chicanas. The narratives from these women assist in the formation of their ancestors. Unfortunately, those Chicanas who choose to become academics bump up against academic borders that tell them their narratives are not publishable because of their fragmented-ness, their queerness, or, simply, their difference. Cruz contends, "The body is a pedagogical device, a location of recentering and recontextualizing the self and the stories that emanate from that self" (668). She encourages researchers to interrogate the histories of one's social locations in order to get closer to making sense of how one's body influences one's pedagogical strategies. An instructor's body in a GE diversity course tells the students something. An instructor has the opportunity to resist and/or reinforce social norms. In Chapters Four and Five, I offer some ways contingent faculty of different positionalities navigate the time and space of neoliberal academia.

This chapter highlights the precarity of living within a neoliberal system. This system shapes bodies into entrepreneurs of one's self despite (or, perhaps because of) its detriment to democracy. Correspondingly, these bodies become obsessed with feelings of security. Although Isabell Lorey believes the government encourages these precarious bodies to be fearful of those who might be precarious in different ways, she also believes these bodies have the potential to join together. In one way or another, teaching GE diversity courses is precarious for all those who teach it. This dissertation recognizes the potential of precarity in these courses to bring faculty together. However, at the same time they come together through precarity, faculty must recognize differences in precarity. The intersectional experience of each faculty influences how they feel their precarity, as well as how care about it. In the following chapters, I take a closer look at how contingent faculty of different experiences feel, live through, and negotiate their precarity while teaching GE diversity courses. Through this recognition, I hope other faculty begin to desire a coalition that holds contingent faculty up rather than keeps them down.

## Chapter Two: The Evolution of Neoliberal Academia in the United States and Its Inevitable Exploitation of Diversity

I bumped around neoliberal academia for much of my adult life. After my first three years of undergrad, I dropped out because I found what I thought was my dream job before graduation. Unsurprisingly, the job was not a dream, so I applied to a new university. I was accepted, but then money was an issue and I could not enroll. Eventually, I found myself in California with loans to pay, but no degree to show for them. I enrolled at California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH). My mom flew to California to see the first person in her family to graduate college. My experience at CSUDH began my years as a student and, then, an instructor in the CSU system. The CSU system trained me as a neoliberal worker, but it also gave me a different version of diversity than my Indiana college.

I tell more of this story in other parts of this dissertation. In this chapter, I want to focus on the system creating neoliberal diversity workers. During the semester, I am in a constant rush to complete as many tasks as possible. Here is what goes through my mind when I am not inside the classroom: I must prep my class in less than an hour or I will not have time to grade. I need to grade quickly so I can get to my dissertation work. These interviews cannot last too long because I need to have time to write. When it is time to write, I must not take time to get into to flow, so I just write. Or I feel guilty for not writing (enough). I need to finish!

This historiography chapter works against my neoliberal notion of finishing quickly because it forces me to take my time to look at time. Looking back to better understand the development of neoliberal academia in the United States provides me with an opportunity to see how neoliberalism convinced some in academia that it was what the students and faculty needed in order to be more accessible to students and more excellent compared to universities who took

longer to see the value of the neoliberal path. In this chapter, I (attempt to) take a moment to slow down to illustrate how the development of neoliberal academia impacted the California Master Plan. I also describe the uniqueness of California State University, Northridge (CSUN) within this Master Plan.

### **The History of Neoliberal Academia in the United States**

Neoliberal academia is an academic environment that encourages individualism of those within it. At the same time, this environment possesses a consumerist view of education where universities must sell the best product to their consumers (students). Before exploring the complexities of neoliberal academia, it is important to understand how the United States arrived at this condition. In order to do so, I turn to scholars in higher education, including the works on academia capitalism from Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades (1997, 2000) as well as Christopher Newfield's (2008) work on neoliberalism's impact on the university.

Most researchers agree the shift towards neoliberal academia began in the late 1970s or early 1980s (Slaughter and Rhoades, 1997; Newfield, 2008; Chatterjee and Maira, 2014; and Heller, 2016). Before exploring that in more detail, I want to provide an abbreviated history of the few decades leading up to this shift. Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira (2014) see World War II as an important moment in understanding the neoliberal condition of education. As the United States rose to become a global superpower, the country began looking to universities to help them maintain their power. Universities provided new ways of performing hard power (such as the atom bomb) as well as soft power (such as linguistic and cultural knowledge of other countries as well as those within their borders). At the same time, businesses began looking to universities for innovative power in order to compete in an increasingly global marketplace. The emergence of the Cold War solidified the relationship between the military, business, and the

university by showing that the end of a major war did not mean the end of a need for research to serve the global needs of the country.

Although some have described this era as a “golden age” for higher education because of research that bolstered government and business (Heller, 2016, 171), not everyone greeted this partnership with optimism. For some, the increase in federal funding to support research that upheld national security meant a dangerous relationship that could limit other types of research. Skeptics ranging from Dwight Eisenhower, Noam Chomsky, and Hannah Arendt voiced their concerns about the partnership between military and academia. In the 1960s, anti-Vietnam War protests, the civil rights movement, and other movements against imperialism joined in the criticism of this partnership (Chatterjee and Maira). University students began questioning whether the university had the best interests of the world in mind. According to Henry Heller, this student skepticism blossomed in tandem with the increased interest in Marxist scholarship at US universities. University faculty, as well as students, pushed against the government’s agenda in academia during this era.

In response, parts of the university shifted to make room for different ways of seeing the world. This process happened in a couple of ways. First, postmodernism came to academia. Depending on who you ask, this was either detrimental to the university or an important development in critical thinking. Heller describes postmodernism as “untenable skepticism” that turned its back on history (171). He sees this perspective as one that led to a lack of focus in academia. On the other hand, Newfield calls it a way to expose the false notion of the ability of any academic department to maintain freedom from outside factors or achieve complete truth. For Newfield, postmodernists placed their focus on the inability of one path to freedom or truth.

No matter where one stands on postmodernism's effects on academia, this new way of thinking impacted the way those in a university talked about notions of truth.

At the same time, a second major change took hold in academia. In the 1970s, ethnic and women's studies departments formed, providing radicals with a space to consider what a different university, and different world, might look like. Heller deems this the cultural turn. This marks an important moment in the development of higher education in the United States. At this point, marginalized populations were officially invited to the table, but, quickly, academia began making this invite work for the system. This shift will be explored in the following section, after solidifying the formation of neoliberal academia in the United States.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, academia continued their move towards neoliberalism. Neoliberal academia is the university environment that centers consumerism, independence, and market-value over cooperation and education. Previous scholarship places the blame for this turn in a few different areas all of which are interrelated. First, after years of dwindling funding, the late 1970s saw a sharp decline in government funding of the university, leading to a rise in tuition (Heller). According to Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), "The neoliberal state began to turn students into consumers as early as 1972, when Congress shifted higher education funding from institutions to students" (22). Although the government attempted to help those unable to afford tuition through grants, many students sought out loans in order to pay for their education.

In *Unmaking the Public University*, Newfield (2008) identifies how the neoliberal shift in education funding led to difficulties for those in the humanities. As universities contend against others for value, they place their funds in departments that produce profitable knowledge. For example, science departments could produce sellable patents for products such as life-saving medicines or weapons for defending the country. As is the case in a market-based society,

profitable knowledge does not include the types of knowledge coming from the humanities, even though many in the humanities would consider those of a different sort of profit. Newfield believes prioritizing STEM departments over the humanities led to a split between quantitative and qualitative research. He writes, “While science and engineering fields were seen as producing profitable knowledge, the humanities were often cast as the source of nonknowledge or even a kind of *antiknowledge*, one that led to social division and economic costs” (25, emphasis author’s own).

Second, as this funding shift happened, access to universities began to increase. According to Slaughter and Rhoades, access for students of all social backgrounds and ethnicities increased from the 1970s through the 1990s. In this time period, the number of students who went straight from high school to college increased by 15%. Although some researchers hoped increased access would mean a decrease in higher education inequities (Mortenson, 2009), this hope did not come to fruition. Yes, more low-income students began attending college, but, at the same time, high-income students became even more likely to attend college. In 1970, 15% of those who came from families in the top income quartile went to college. By 1994, this number rose to 29% (Mortenson). For those in the low-income quartile, the number increased from 6% to 9% (Mortenson). During this time, the government passed the Middle-Income Assistance Act (1978) as well as the Tax Relief Act (1997), both of which alleviated some of the financial burden for middle- and upper-income families, but did nothing to help low-income students (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004).

A similar pattern is seen in some other marginalized populations. For example, the percentage of 25-29-year old African Americans who attended four years or more of college increased from 8% in 1974 to 15% in 1995 (Mortenson). Latinos saw an increase from 6% to 9%



(Mortenson). For whites, this number went from 20 to 26% (Mortenson). Of course, the numbers are not all bad. Women became more than 50% of the student body (in some cases, well over this number). Asian Americans also saw a large increase in college-educated individuals (Slaughter and Rhoades). Affirmative action appeared to help some marginalized populations more than others, but for many of these populations, it did not come close to leveling the playing field. And, of course, an increase in access did not mean a shift in the curriculum to become more inclusive of the change in student population.

Although there was little improvement for some marginalized communities, the mid-1990s saw a call for an end to affirmative action because of preferential treatment of the marginalized. Universities all over the country, from Texas to Michigan to Maryland to California, were dealing with lawsuits against affirmative action (Newfield). Some of them chose to take preemptive action. For example, in 1995, Ward Connerly, the University of California (UC) Board of Regents, investigated affirmative action at all UCs. Upon completion of this investigation, Connerly led the campaign against affirmative action at UCs and eventually won support for it. According to Newfield, the two main arguments against affirmative action were reverse discrimination and the prioritization of an applicant's background over fair competition for all applicants. Although follow-up investigations initiated by the UC president Jack Peltason did not show preferential treatment on a grand scale, the UC system agreed to changes in their admission policies. This example, with others occurring around the same time throughout the US, fueled the flame of those who had already found affirmative action problematic.

Third, public universities had to compete in a hyper-capitalist environment, meaning they had to become even more concerned about market competition (Heller). In *Academic Capitalism*, Slaughter and Rhoades writes, "In the new economy, knowledge is a critical raw material to be

mined and extracted from any unprotected site; patented, copyrighted, trademarked, or held as a trade secret; then sold in the marketplace for profit” (4). From a neoliberal perspective, market competition would allow for universities to become better as they work against other options. At the same time, this would mean less government spending. Neoliberals frame this as a win-win. However, according to Heller, it is not that simple. In fact, Heller shows that spending in the public sector, including universities, in the 1930s helped the United States recover from the Great Depression. And, as for market competition leading to a better product, Heller believes the competitive nature of many academics already allow for universities to function well. To suggest academia needs neoliberalism, Heller believes, ignores previous successes.

Nevertheless, these universities began marketing to potential students a brand that gave the students what they needed in order to be successful. Heller writes, “Education was less a public right or a direct government responsibility and more a private investment made by knowledge consumers in order to eventually improve their prospects in the market” (184). Part of their marketing strategy included using the students as a form of advertisement. Slaughter and Rhoades discuss the slippery slope of the way universities use students to attract interest. If a university accepts a class with high-test scores, their prestige rises and with prestige comes more applicants. And as the students go on to succeed after college, their university receives bragging rights. So, in this example, not only are students the consumers, but they are also the input and output of the university (Slaughter and Rhoades). Students decide to attend if they see other students are able to succeed. Of course, rarely, if at all, do universities sell themselves on the amount of student debt each student receives after graduation. The success stories rarely discuss the length of time each student gives up some of their paycheck to the bank.

Another way universities market to students is through the branding of diversity. Universities perform diversity by including non-white faces to their advertising, communicating that diversity means bringing in people who “look different” from the norm (Ahmed and Swan, 2006, 98). This message continues to center whiteness, making people of color feel out of place. In the introduction to a journal issue on doing diversity, Sara Ahmed and Elaine Swan (2006) write, “In so far as diversity is seen to be embodied by others, it then allows the whiteness of such organization to be concealed” (98). Using diversity as a brand exploits the ‘difference’ of those who are already receiving skepticism related to affirmative action. This also has a major impact on curriculum, which is discussed in the following section on multiculturalism and diversity in higher education.

Fourth, public universities began to shift the make-up of their workers. They began hiring non-tenure track faculty as well as expanding the administrative branch of the university (Heller). Slaughter and Rhoades observe a decrease of money spent on teaching in the 1980s. At that time, the money shifted to fund research in order to fuel competition against other universities. In their follow-up to their 1997 book on academic capitalism, Slaughter and Rhoades wrote of a new financial pattern in academia, one where money began to flow towards nonacademic aspects of the university, including administrators. Although they had been functioning like private corporations for some time, universities began to add more administrators who took care of the institution, but who were also at “arm’s length” with the teaching and researching faculty (Heller, 174).

Flexibility became an important way of keeping labor costs down while appearing to care about the laborers. Of course, the flexibility is the kind that works for the university rather than the laborers. Flexibility means whatever times work for the students rather than when faculty

might be available to teach them. The utilization of contingent faculty is a major way universities provide flexibility to their students. In 1970, contingent faculty made up 20% of the university workforce (Slaughter and Rhoades). Today, they make up 70% of the workforce. Unsurprisingly, this flexibility does not always lead to the best conditions for students or faculty. In *The Adjunct Underclass*, Herb Childress (2019) writes, “This is not a recipe for the attentive, patient mentoring of young minds... This is simply the provision of a product at lowest cost” (4). In the rest of his book, Childress explores the ways contingent faculty are exploited by their universities at the detriment to the mission of many of the same universities. The university does little for its students if most of their courses are taught by instructors who might not hold much allegiance to the university or who might not be there the following semester to write them a recommendation letter.

Childress touches on the relationship between contingency and GE courses as well. He writes, “These are the courses that are treated as commodities, one product being the same as any other, produced and consumed in every landscape, teachable by faculty with less specialization and experience” (78). Although I do not agree with the insinuation that contingent faculty might not be as good teaching-wise as those with more specialization, the point Childress makes is an important one, especially as it relates to GE diversity courses. In later chapters, I reveal the domino effect that happens when some, more veteran contingent faculty choose to stop teaching GE diversity courses, pushing those courses to less experienced faculty.

As he considers ways the hiring of contingent faculty impacts universities, Childress adds graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) as another group that does a large portion of the GE teaching, but who will not be around to continue building relationships with students in their last few years. He estimates 15 to 20 percent of teaching faculty are GTAs. Much like contingent

faculty, GTAs are hired on contract for each semester. However, GTAs are different because they are hired in exchange for some or all of their tuition. GTAs offer even cheaper labor than contingent faculty, allowing neoliberal academia to exploit another group of instructors. This exploitation has not gone unnoticed by GTAs, as some of them have fought back against neoliberal academia on occasion. Of course, the major difference between GTAs and other contingent faculty is that a GTA position ends upon graduation. It has an end point, unlike contingency, which means contingent faculty have more time to stew in their frustration. Sometimes this frustration becomes misdirected to GTAs. Since they typically teach lower division GE courses, some contingent faculty might view GTAs as competition. At the same time, some GTAs become contingent faculty upon graduation. Personally, I moved from a GTA position to contingent faculty and I was shocked by this shift. While serving as a GTA, I received the course times I wanted and the support I needed. I felt valued. My move to contingency made me feel like I moved down after graduation.

Another difference between GTAs and contingent faculty is they have more time to seemingly disappear. Childress describes contingent faculty as invisible workers because they typically are not invited to meetings (or cannot make them) and they are typically rushing between classes and, sometimes, universities, which means they do not have a lot of face time with faculty on the tenure line. While I agree this is true, conditions are starting to change slightly because of the willingness of some contingent faculty to share their experiences. In 1998, the experience of former contingent faculty Eileen Schell compelled her to explore the working conditions in English Departments. She approaches these conditions through a gendered, feminist lens because women tend to be around 65% of part-time faculty in humanities departments, including English. Schell believes this is particularly interesting because of the

support of “affirmative action, equal opportunity, and gender inclusiveness” within many humanities departments (4). She writes, “Seduced by visions of academic gentility and by the myth of the meritocracy, many women are drawn to academic careers out of a hope that they will find meaningful work devoid of the political hazards and gender inequities of other professions” (71). Through her ethnographic process, she finds many of these women view gender stratification in higher education as similar to other careers. Her observations show that women who possess a maternal pedagogy end up stuck in their positions because they are convinced, by the responses of their students and their colleagues, that women should only show their leadership in soft, passive ways. Schell encourages women to explore other forms of leadership, including an ethics of care that involves caring about the workplace just as much as they care about their classrooms. This might involve pushing harder for what they deserve, both individually and as a coalition. Since Schell does not focus on other marginalized populations, this dissertation aims to hear from those of different positionalities in order to present a more nuanced, and up to date, understanding of this experience.

In more recent work from Schell, she recognizes job conditions worsened for many contingent faculty, especially women and people of color. In 2017, she identifies similar gender stratification as she did in 1998, with women hovering around 60% of contingent faculty, depending on the department. She believes this to be the case because many still make the assumptions that women are married to men, which, of course, is not supported by statistics. Schell also focuses her criticism of neoliberal academia on the exploitation of Black faculty, who are exploited through contingency more than whites. The AAUP reports 15.2% of Black faculty are contingent whereas only 9.6 faculty are white. Schell cites Tressie McMillian Cottom who points out Black faculty and students have been “protesting the ghettofication of Black scholars

in adjunct roles for almost 20 years” (xvi). Specifically, McMillian Cottom cites a 1968 demand for more tenured Black professors at Columbia University. Later in this chapter, I write about similar demands by the CSUN student body.

Another important component of Schell’s 1998 work is the busting of destructive contingent faculty stereotypes. Here are a few: (1) Contingent faculty teach for the love of the subject, rather than the money, (2) They are less competent teachers, and (3) They lack institutional loyalty (40). In my experience, those outside of academia still believe these myths, but inside academia the perspective is starting to change. As more research reveals the struggles of contingent faculty, more social justice-minded tenured and tenure-track faculty begin to see contingent faculty differently. Still, at least some tenured and tenure track faculty as well as administrators perceive contingent faculty as less than in some ways. While it might be hard to find faculty who admit this, the proof is in the way contingent faculty are treated. In *University Ethics*, James Keenan (2015) describes contingent faculty as the first case for understanding how ethics operate in the university. After exploring their treatment, academia might be able to better understand how to ethically improve in other areas. If contingent faculty are not given office space, are asked to rearrange their schedules at the last minute, and/or are expected to teach any course no matter their experience, they are not treated fairly. And I have not even mentioned the dismal pay and lack of health insurance in many cases. Much like Schell suggests above, Keenan believes academics must start to form solidarity with contingent faculty, as they are the ones teaching most of the courses. Importantly, this solidarity includes getting to know the experience of contingent faculty.

For Keenan, as well as other higher education researchers such as Derek Bok (2015), a focus on contingent faculty might guide universities into a reshaping of their values. In a

neoliberal climate, money and independence rules all. A look at contingent faculty might push against some of these neoliberal values to force the university to consider how the exploitation of contingent faculty might limit the education of its students. Adding to this, shining a light on the experience of contingent faculty might help other staff and faculty members realize how the allowance of exploitation of one part of the university might trickle into the exploitation of others. Finally, this exploration forces those in the university to confront ways they have allowed others to be exploited in order to make their academic lives better. A few academics have started to do this, including Seth Kahn, William Lalicker, and Amy Lynch-Binieck. These three academics served as editors for the text *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition*. Within the pages of this text, contingent and tenured faculty explore ways of building solidarity across academia. While it does not aim to serve as the guide for every university, or even every department, it shifts the focus of contingent faculty research from despair or anger about the situation to ways of taking action to change these affects.

### **Affirmative Action, Multiculturalism, and Diversity**

In *The Reorder of Things*, Roderick Ferguson (2012) describes neoliberalism as the latest form of academia's "cannibalization of difference and its potential for rupture" (213). This section digs into this cannibalization. Ferguson's ideas on institutionality begin this process. Then, I move to ways academia reacted to affirmative action, including ways academia made multiculturalism work for them. Finally, I describe the shift from multiculturalism to diversity and how that shift impacted university mission statements and institutional culture.

Ferguson's *The Reorder Of Things* describes how the institution capitalized on the call from ethnic groups, women, and other marginalized groups to be more inclusive of their perspectives. Using Foucault's work on power/knowledge, Ferguson illustrates ways academia



folded in whispers of marginalized voices while shouting homogenized ways of being. Although indebted to him, Ferguson describes this process as a bit different than Foucault's work on power/knowledge. Rather than allowing discourse to mold knowledge of the institution, he believes universities have taken categories, such as sexuality, and shaped them in ways that fit their institution. He calls this process a will to institutionality. Through this process, academia not only constructs a place where more perspectives could exist, but it also creates a process of subjection. He writes, "The will to institutionality not only absorbs institutions and modern subjects; it is itself a mode of subjection as well" (214). He believes this subjection encourages desire within the subjects for the institution. The subjects (students, faculty, staff) fear the dissolution of it.

Ferguson argues that affirmative action forced academia to make room for women, ethnic groups, and/or other marginalized groups. Initially, rather than considering a shift in institutional culture, most institutions chose to continue operating as usual while adding a huge number of students with different perspectives, needs, and abilities. Soon, some of these new student groups began to pressure the university to shift to include more perspectives in the curriculum. Of course, as discussed in the previous paragraph, the institution has already set the standards for their behavior. Importantly, this tone-setting includes the behavior of revolt just as much as it includes the behavior of staying in line. For example, if students demand a Chicano Studies program, they might get it. However, this new program does not receive as much funding as other departments, especially the STEM departments because, the neoliberal argument goes, they bring in private funding with their research. This example illustrates Foucault's understanding of power as not simply repressive. As Ferguson shows through the use of Foucault, administrative power at the university provides the constructs of any shifts.

One way the university did this was through the use of multiculturalism. In the 1980s, multiculturalism became popularized as a corrective to the racialization in previous decades. According to Moallem and Boal (1999), this process became a way for U.S. liberals to collapse and make invisible all the histories of race, gender, and other socioeconomic conflicts. They write, “Multicultural nationalism operates on the fault line between a universalism based on the notion of an abstract citizenship that at the same time systematically produces sexualized, gendered, and racialized bodies, and particularistic claims for recognition and justice by minoritized groups” (245). They believe the United States utilizes multiculturalism as a way to push past difficult conversations, in order to form united identity. When pushing past these conversations, they disallow for the negotiations that need to take place in order to make marginalized groups feel part of the national identity. Ferguson sees this nationalism as part of the way academia exploits marginalized perspectives in the name of inclusion. He saw the United States as framing the responsibility of inclusion as one way to move forward. He writes, “Yet, as responsibility was increasingly defined through nationalist politics that idealized heteropatriarchal, able-ist, and ethically homogeneous notions of community, responsibility – as an ideal – was often used to establish elaborate systems of regulation designed to determine what activities, interests, spaces, and experiences needed to be disciplined to the point of docility” (112). So, moving forward only meant moving as far as those in power felt necessary.

According to Jenny Sharpe (2000), the 1990s brought a new challenge to the handling of multiculturalism in education. This decade brought an increasing concern to define multiculturalism in international terms. Sharpe believes the erosion of affirmative action led to this reconfiguration of multiculturalism. A multiculturalism in international terms takes the focus farther away from the unequal distribution of power. Instead, this global multiculturalism

encourages students to be citizens of the world in order to better navigate positions at transnational corporations. And, similar to the national multiculturalism, this navigation does not explore power's role in future interactions.

In *Neoliberalism as Exception*, Aihwa Ong (2006) shows implicit connection between neoliberalism and the globalization of multiculturalism. She writes, "As American universities become global sites for training an array of knowledge skills, a gulf is opening up between moral education and technical education, between education for national citizenship and training for what might be called borderless, "neoliberal" citizenship" (139). For Ong, the shift molds students into neoliberal citizens prepared to make an impact in the global economy. She believes this shift came with the increase of a multicultural focus. While she recognizes that academia had an interest in multicultural education as a way to eliminate discrimination in recent decades, she also believes this goal is driven by the need to create citizens who achieve global success with the "skills, talent, and borderless neoliberal ethos" they receive from their university (148). So, what ends up happening is multicultural education stops at the national level. When preparing students for a global society, the focus lies on potential earning and success rather than the recognition of cultural differences.

While this neoliberal training is problematic for the students in the United States, Ong also highlights the transnational issues produced by this focus. Those students who choose to study in the United States rather than their home country receive this neoliberal citizenship training and, quite possibly, might be going back to a country that does not align with these values. Adding to this, typically, these students are privileged compared to those in their country, which means they receive training that places them into a category Ong calls "free-floating individuals" with little attachment to citizenship (global or national). Instead, they are individuals

who focus on their worthiness and the worthiness of others. Ong believes this focus on worthiness occludes a focus on citizenship rights, leading to a world less concerned about the rights of others.

At the same time of this international multiculturalism shift, Sharpe also believes the liberal multiculturalism of the 1980s created an atmosphere that made most academic institutions conservative on the affirmative action debates that began in the 1990s. The affirmative action debates of the 1990s illustrate the built-up tensions in the way administrators chose to take on the inclusion of marginalized students. Sharpe believes that because they chose to tackle multiculturalism with the use of diversity and difference rather than confront the heart of the issue, the unequal distribution of power, administrators responded to those upset about affirmative action by abolishing the use of race, ethnicity, gender, and other marginalized identities in the admission process. She writes, “Constituted around diversity and difference rather than racism and the unequal distribution of power, liberal multiculturalism weakened the original goals of multicultural education, which were to redress the debilitating effects of racial (and sexual) discrimination” (Sharpe, 115). If administrators had confronted the unequal parts of society with their multiculturalism agenda rather than disassociate the two issues, they might have avoided this conservative shift. This disassociation provides another opportunity for the institution to place the burden onto the individual student rather than the system, one of the symptoms of neoliberal academia.

### *Diversity Statements*

As academia struggled to define multiculturalism, universities began to use their mission statements to sculpt a particular view of this process. Ideally, mission statements provide a glimpse into ways faculty, administrators, staff, and students work together to create the

university's atmosphere. Unfortunately, mission statements do not typically serve as a guiding path for the university. In his 2013 overview of academia in the United States, Derek Bok (2015) described mission statements as, "a vacuous statement that seems designed primarily to appeal to potential applicants and donors" (34). This rings true of my experience, described in the introduction of this dissertation. My first university branded itself as diverse in its mission statements and pamphlets, a place where I could experience perspectives of classmates of different backgrounds. I did not see or hear much of this in my three years at the university. As universities began choosing to add diversity to their mission statements, they brought another layer to the way multiculturalism became appropriated by neoliberal academia.

In the essay "Race, Multiculturalism, and Pedagogies of Dissent," Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) considers what the focus on multiculturalism does for difference in the university. As a feminist working in a variety of spaces where she would be read differently depending on the political, social, and economic context, she became confused and frustrated with the negotiations she had to deal with in a university that was so focused on diversity. Mohanty writes, "One of the fundamental challenges of "diversity" after all is to understand our collective differences in terms of historical agency and responsibility so that we can understand others and build solidarities across divisive boundaries" (191). For her, identity is not only static categories, but also fluid, interwoven ones that tie everyone together. In order to truly work towards diversity, the university must seek to acknowledge and engage these complicated ties.

Mohanty does not see academia engaging in these complications. Instead, academia participates in the "race industry" (196). She identifies this industrialization of race as an example of the ways the corporate university takes from marginalized groups without giving them space to voice their understanding of race (or gender or class, or any other category).

Oftentimes, as marginalized communities are folded into the university, one narrative becomes the only narrative for each community. Mohanty implores radical academics to do better. She suggests identifying narratives that are legitimized in academia and considering what these are considered more legit than others. She also wants teachers to bring multiple stories to the forefront while at the same time encouraging the questioning of stories who are centered and those who are pushed to the outside. She calls for pedagogies of dissent that encourage dissent in the classroom. With this dissent, students, and teachers, can better understand the different layers to their dissension, from the institutional level (academia) and the interpersonal level.

In “Teaching for the Times,” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1992) offers more suggestions for ways teachers might work against the commodification of diversity. She agrees with Mohanty that an engagement of difference is important. At the same time, she encourages unity amongst academics, especially those who are from marginalized groups. As more individuals gain power in academia, they are responsible for making change, but they cannot do it by collapsing into separate groups. She believes they can achieve more power if they work together despite differences. She writes, “To claim agency in the emerging dominant is to recognize agency in others, not simply to comprehend otherness” (Mohanty 7). Students look to their instructors for guidance in how to maneuver in difference and it is important instructors provide them with examples of maneuvering despite, or sometimes because of, difference.

Spivak extends these arguments in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. She speaks of ways marginality influences humanities courses, especially when it comes to the question of worthiness in a classroom. For her, worthiness includes the value of a subject, the manageability of an assignment, and the time it takes to grade. As neoliberal academia takes it hold on courses, instructors are forced to confront which parts of their subject are worthy enough to discuss in

their limited time and/or space with their students. Spivak encourages instructors to take on the challenge of seeking out the non-canonical, those texts that might not get read in other courses or the marginal groups that are not typically covered. In this piece, Spivak does not explicitly speak to the extra work this might mean for contingent faculty who are already spread very thin, but this piece illuminates one of the challenges of teaching diversity courses in the humanities for any faculty who might want to take on this non-canonical challenge.

In the final chapter of this text, Spivak guides instructors into a globalized way of teaching diversity courses. She believes these courses must consider ways individual identity relate to nationalism discourses. In other words, these courses must examine who counts as part of nationalist sentiments and who does not. This provides ways to stop fetishizing certain identities, marginalized or not, and presents students with ways to better understand the experience of others. Upon doing this, she believes, nationalism is stripped to reveal the true nature of this ideology: racist, imperialist, and neocolonialist (Spivak, 301). This process also provides a jumping off point to consider ways nationalism in other countries might create similar results. Spivak hopes these types of considerations might offer students with multiple ways of seeing the world.

### **Neoliberal Academia in California**

So far, I have focused on the development of the neoliberal university in the United States. Since my focus will be on contingent faculty who work at CSUN, I want to zoom in closer to illustrate the development of the university system in this state. As I explore this example, the historical context of the US university system provides some understanding of how the California university system arrived at its current condition. At the same time, as with any state, California deals with unique issues that must be explored before embarking on an

ethnographic project to understand one school inside this large system. Of particular importance for this is an understanding of the California Master Plan. Passed in 1960, California hoped this plan would allow for more California residents to attend college. The Master Plan used the previous higher education system in California to outline a specific focus for each part of the system. The community colleges (CCCs) were tasked with providing instruction for the first two years after college (Smelser, 1974). The state colleges (eventually known as CSUs) were to focus on training undergraduate and master's students in applied fields (Smelser, 1974). The university system (UCs) maintained its position as the research arm of the higher education system in California. It also received sole authority to provide doctoral degrees as well as law degrees and graduate degrees in medicine. This tertiary plan provided Californians with higher education options, which helped to increase enrollment growth.

Unfortunately, the massive growth of students brought in because of this plan produced a number of major challenges. In his exploration of two decades (1950-1970) of changes in the California university system, Neil J. Smelser (1974) describes the pressure placed on the university to grow. He believes the pressure to grow came in the aftermath of the approval of the Master Plan as the system was not "performing up to the level of the demands being made on it" (Smelser, 15). He identifies two causes of this pressure. First, the UCs dealt with competition against the East Coast universities. Smelser believes this system always had an other-oriented approach because California had to work against already established excellent universities on the other side of the nation. This goal of excellence was written into the legislature as early as 1867, but it became especially important in the 1960s and 1970s as California hoped to encourage the state government to send more funding to education. This competitive nature trickled down into the different parts of the university system, including regional and communal. Second, the



Master Plan aimed for the accessibility of college for as many individuals as possible (Smelser calls this ‘popular egalitarianism’). In order to achieve this goal, the California set up a community college system that provided Californians geographically close and economically affordable higher education options. In fact, this accessibility incentivized the state to provide the entire higher education system with resources. The Master Plan added to this accessibility by requiring community colleges to admit any high school graduate.

Although he is writing about a time before neoliberal academia came to fruition, this exploration of pressure foreshadows the ways the institution and faculty would be squeezed into a particular type of body. Institutionally, these two competing goals led to a financial hierarchy in California higher education. According to Smelser, the dual goals of excellence in education and a major increase in accessibility work against each other, especially because other institutions already defined excellence in education for the California system. The negotiation between these two goals led to the system placing much more funding per student into the UCs, less funding into the CSUs, and even less to the CCCs. Soon, the UCs became the part of the plan that performed the goal of excellence in education and the CCCs became the part that provided more accessibility. The CSUs became lost somewhere in between, performing a bit of the excellence and a bit of the accessibility goals. Smelser writes, “The state colleges, in short, found themselves in a classic Tocquevillian situation of an estate with partial access to the activities and rewards of another estate while facing rigid barriers to further access” (67). In order to satisfy state college frustrations, the system granted permission for all state colleges to become state universities. However, this action was only a change in name, as it did not provide a way for state colleges (or now state universities) to change their position in the three-tiered system (McConnell, 1974).

This systemic hierarchy had the danger of reinforcing the social hierarchy outside the system. In other words, the upward mobility that a student might hope for by going to college could end up being more difficult if they started at the community college rather than in the university system. Immediately after the passage of the California Master Plan, this did not necessarily prove to be the case. In fact, McConnell (1974) reports only a quarter of the students who started at one institution would end their education in that same institution. Transferring between the systems was not only possible, but was very likely. However, there was other research that indicated social mobility might not be happening as often as the Master Plan had hoped. In their considerations of major problems resulting from the California Master Plan, John Vasconcellos and Patrick Callan (1974) write, “Despite our claims that higher education provides an avenue of social mobility, we persist in using culturally, economically, and socially biased admissions criteria that exclude most lower- and lower-middle class persons from our “better” institutions” (270). They believe the same can be said of the way research functions in universities. The money provides direction of what to research, which, Vasoncellos and Callan say, reinforce the power of the wealthy.

This growth brought with it changes for the faculty. As the campuses were divided by their goals for students (such as applied programs versus research-based ones), this affected the funds available for faculty to perform research. Those teaching community college received almost no budget to cover research costs (Smelser). At the same time, “The state colleges had a foot in the research door, but financing was so modest that the university maintained a virtual monopoly on organized and sponsored research” (Smelser, 55-56). CSUs began to ask for the system to reconsider the financial disparity. Not only did they have a problem with the lack of funding for research, they also felt frustrated about the heavier teaching loads as well as the

inequivalent salary schedules. In order to circumvent the system, some CSU faculty began seeking outside research grants (McConnell). Although the implications were not as obvious at this time, this separation would become especially important as the neoliberal atmosphere developed.

Not only did some faculty focus their efforts finding outside funding for their research, the faculty also began to rely on ancillary personnel to assist with their teaching and researching. In the time between 1950 and 1970, the student to teacher ratio began to increase, the student and faculty interaction began to decrease, and regular faculty decreased their teaching load (Smelser). All of these changes correlated with an increased reliance on ancillary faculty. Smelser calls ancillary faculty those who are teaching assistants, research assistants, and any other workers who helped the university fulfill their teaching and research goals. These ancillary faculty, including contingent faculty members, allowed the university to “adapt to changing demands for teaching and changing opportunities for research” (Smelser 101). In particular, ancillary faculty began teaching more of the lower-division general education courses so that regular faculty were not burdened with these tedious courses.

Although it sometimes feels as if the contingent struggles are a relatively new issue, Smelser recognized this issue in the 1970s. Unsurprisingly, he found the lack of work balance between contingent faculty and regular faculty as problematic. More importantly, he identified the lack of proper recognition of the value of contingent faculty to be an issue that must be addressed. He writes, “Called upon to perform many of the university’s instructional activities, the teaching assistant was nevertheless often reminded that he [they] did not have the faculty’s privileges and prerogatives. He [They] did not have tenure, was not a member of an academic department, was not normally permitted to teach other graduate students, and was not part of the

faculty senate” (Smelser, 106). While he is specifically writing about teaching assistants here, all of this rings true today when considering the experience of contingent faculty. At the same moment when contingent faculty began to be used by the university, the administration side of this system began to expand. This trend continues today and is part of the problem of neoliberal academia.

An understanding of the Master Plan and its immediate impacts is necessary for a project that plans to better grasp any experience in one part of this tertiary system. Now, I want to move on to the long-term implications of the California Master Plan. In his essay “From Chaos to Order and Back,” John Aubrey Douglass (2010) reflects on the results of The Master Plan fifty years after its implementation. Although he recognizes the immediate results of an increase of students choosing higher education, he believes the designers of the plan did not anticipate the rapid growth in California’s population or the interest of higher education for Californians. Specifically, this was a problem for the CCCs. Douglass states The Master Plan projected relatively equal enrollment between the three parts of the system. Instead, by 1975, 60 percent of all undergraduates attended community college. In 2014, the California Legislative Analyst Office places this percentage at 75. The CCCs rely on local and state funding, but they receive much less than the UCs and CSUs. Adding to this, for accessibility reasons, CCCs are not permitted to increase tuition, an option that the other two parts are allowed and take advantage of quite often (Boland et. al 2018). This unanticipated imbalance between the three parts only adds another layer to the existing budget woes.

Douglass continues by showing other major struggles for the California higher education system. The Master Plan garnered worldwide attention for its accessibility as well as its systemic placement of students interested in achieving different goals. However, by 2010, Douglass sees

California higher education as “mediocre in terms of access” compared to other states (12). He places the blame on a few major issues that will only get worse, including rising tuition, major demographic changes, and a decrease in public funding. Adding to this, Douglass hopes policy makers can figure out how to match public funding with the major growth of the student population. He writes,

“Pessimism has replaced optimism; simply getting by each budget year has replaced the seeming “luxury” of long-term strategic thinking. In short, the coordinated approach to expanding capacity and building academic programs envisioned by the 1960 Master Plan has devolved into each of the segments attempting to simply cope with dramatic funding shortfalls.” (14)

This quote illustrates the affective nature of any faculty who must push for more money for higher education in California. This dissertation focuses on the affective and emotional experiences of contingent faculty who depend on this funding for their job, but who are often overlooked when considering the needs of higher education.

Perhaps to offset some of the financial problems, the university continued its focus on private funding. In the 1970-1971 academic year, the university was 7% of the state budget, but in 2006-2007 school year it was down to around 3% (Newfield). In the same time period, private funding to the UC system went from less than \$100 million to \$1.4 billion (Newfield). Importantly, CSU played a role in UC’s choice to ask for public funding. According to Newfield, in 2000, when the state was especially tight with money, UC hesitated to ask for more public funding because they realized that any request asked by them would be matched by CSU. So, if they were to ask for an extra \$1.4 billion to replace the private funding, the government would end up needing to match that to CSU. This could cost the government almost \$3 billion. UC felt

blocked by the state (Newfield). Although Newfield's research focuses on the experience of the UC part of the tertiary system, one could imagine the other two parts of the system might go through similar considerations.

Even if California's higher education system could somehow fix their financial troubles, the system has an inclusion problem. As The Master Plan suggests, this system aims for both excellence and accessibility. I have already discussed the tension between these two goals. I want to focus here on how accessibility is not a stopping point for a student to feel as if they can excel. In other words, just because a student is accepted does not always mean they believe they can achieve excellence. This is especially true because, as Rodrick Ferguson (2012) explains, universities tend to define excellence bureaucratically by checking off specific boxes in order to receive outside recognition (which, they hope, results in more money). Without a consideration of the student's notion of excellence, some students may feel confused about how they fit and what they should aim to get out of their education.

An important way of providing more students with the feeling that they can be excellent is by showing them that they have the possibility to achieve leadership roles within the university. Seeing at least a part of oneself in one's instructors might open up this possibility. Adding to this, students of color are more likely to finish their degrees if they see their university and their faculty align with some of their backgrounds and values (Boland et. al). Unfortunately, recent numbers show the faculty demographics do not come close to mirroring the student demographics in any part of the higher education system. A 2018 report by The Campaign for College Opportunity finds that tenured and non-tenured faculty are at least 60% white in all three parts of the system. As far as student demographics, whites make up around 25% of each student population. So, for example, the 44% of the CSU student population who is Latino (the largest

demographic by far) has a 10% possibility that their instructors will match their ethnicity. Unfortunately, class, disability, and other demographic information for faculty are not reported, but part of this research hopes to explore how those who are parts of any marginalized demographic experiences the pressure of filling these leadership roles while also teaching courses that dig into ways people navigate these identities.

### **California State University, Northridge**

Although most research on this topic takes a macro approach to neoliberal academia and contingent faculty, I have chosen to use my experience to provide a snapshot of what happens at my university. I am hoping this micro level exploration inspires others to show their different experiences in other public and private institutions. As one part of the large CSU system, CSUN's identity relies largely on the Master Plan's designation of it as a state university rather than a university or community college. Adding to this, as with all colleges in neoliberal academia, they have become increasingly reliant on private donors to supplement the money the government no longer allocates to them. CSUN has not escaped the negative impacts of neoliberalism. Despite all of this, CSUN's faculty, administrators, and students carved out an identity that separates it from other colleges. Recently, the CSU system tried to chip away at part of that identity. In this section, I provide a bit of background on the development of CSUN's identity before describing some recent shifts in the system that uniquely impacts CSUN.

In his 30-year historical look at the college, former CSUN professor John Broesamle (1993) describes CSUN as lost on its academic journey. The founders hoped for an Ivy League reputation, but the Master Plan prevented this goal. Adding to this, budget cuts from as early as 1968 forced the university to increase teaching loads on tenured faculty, leaving less time to focus on the research goals of these same faculty. Before receiving university status, CSUN was

known as San Fernando Valley State College (SFVSC). Initially serving as an offshoot of CSULA, SFVSC became its own entity in 1958. This college provided a new space for the growing Los Angeles area, bringing some students and professors from CSULA to the Valley while at the same time giving those in the Valley a closer opportunity for higher education. In its early stages, the students were described as non-traditional because they were older on average than those at other campuses.

Broesamle believes a major turning point for the university came in 1968 when Black students held the college president and a number of his employees accountable for the lack of support for them. During this time, SFVSC aimed to increase the enrollment of students of color. The college set up an Equal Opportunity Program to assist all marginalized students with their success, but the EOP leaned heavily on the Black Student Union (BSU) and the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) to know how to guide students of color. Leaders in the BSU began shouldering the burden of mediating between faculty and students. At the same time, the BSU began voicing concerns about the treatment of athletes by the Physical Education Department and its coaches. On November 4, 1968, the emotions bubbled over into a football game where a white football coach became physical with a Black football player. This incident set into motion a strong push for this coach to be fired, but it also provided the BSU the opportunity to begin demanding more support from their college.

After tense negotiations and a number of protests, the college established an Afro-American Studies program (now Africana Studies) and a Mexican American Studies program (now Chicana and Chicano Studies). The students also demanded the recruitment of more students and professors of color. Eventually, the university agreed to their demands. A few years later, as CSUN revised their GE requirements, they added a cross-cultural requirement with little



debate (Broesamle). Approval of this requirement set CSUN apart from other scholars such as Stanford and Berkeley, both of which would debate a similar curriculum shift 10 years later. On a broader scale, their efforts, combined with those from other CSUs, led to the passage of the Harmer Bill, a bill that established the Equal Opportunity Program (EOP) to help disadvantaged students succeed in all CSUs.

The following decade also saw expansion of programs for marginalized students. The university began a Women's Studies interdisciplinary program that eventually led to an undergraduate degree program. The Chicana and Chicano Studies program added a master's degree. And the university established the National Center on Deafness. This center is one of the few in the nation that provides deaf students with paid sign language interpreters to assist them as needed. The 1980s and 1990s brought with them the expansion of support for international students as well as a center for students with disabilities (Broesamle). Programs and centers such as those listed above provide support to marginalized students, helping them navigate difficult terrain.

As efforts to bolster marginalized students increased, another important part of the neoliberal academic climate increased as well: contingent faculty. In 1990, contingent faculty made up just under 50% of total faculty at CSUN (Broesamle). Broesamle's history of CSUN blames this shift on a few things. First, and at this point in the chapter this should come as no surprise, it served as a money-saving option. Second, hiring more contingent faculty allowed CSUN to continue "an old artifact of staffing" that prevented departments from hiring more tenured faculty (Broesamle, 105). Of course, by hiring less tenured, faculty departments created more committee and other administrative work for their tenured and tenure-track faculty. Although written about 25 years ago, Broesamle's history writes of contingent faculty in a

similar fashion to how more recent work refers to them: exploited, overworked, and mostly ignored. Today, contingent faculty at CSUN have more job security and more opportunities to be involved in campus activities (if they choose to). At the same time, much like the 1990s, many of these contingent faculty deal with class capacity increases and unstable job offers. This dissertation aims to explore ways those pressures, combined with teaching emotionally charged diversity courses, impacts contingent faculty. In fact, I recently saw my online courses increase by 10 students and my face-to-face courses increase by a handful with little warning of the increase and no consultation of the impact.

In Fall 2018, 38,716 students enrolled at CSUN. Although an individual's ethnic, gender, and other identities do not define them, I want to present some demographic information to help illustrate the population at this institution. Part of the reason I have chosen feminist ethnographic methods is to allow for contingent faculty to illustrate ways different positionalities influence their teaching and well-being in neoliberal academia. Nonetheless, demographics are typically the starting point for understanding this and I will not break that trend here. As a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), 50.8% of CSUN students are Latino. The CSUN Office of Institutional Research also reports 22% of the population is white, 10.4% Asian American, 4.6% African American, 4.3% international students and .1% American Indian. Of these students, 55.1% are women.

As far as faculty, CSUN Office of Institutional Research reports 42.4% of them as tenured or tenure-track, with the rest being lecturers. Although some lecturers might be full-time, the norm at CSUN is to have faculty on year-to-year or every three-year contracts depending on length of time with the university. The percentage of contingent faculty is less than the national average (70%), but still larger than the non-contingent faculty. The gender break down shows

48% of full-time faculty as women, but 52% of part-time faculty as women. The ethnic breakdown is 34% of full-time faculty as ‘members of minority groups’ while 24% of part-time faculty fall into this classification. Again, these numbers are different from the national average, partially because the greater Los Angeles-area is demographically different than many parts of the United States.

Despite these differences, CSUN serves as a necessary place to explore the experiences of contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses, especially because of recent changes in the GE curriculum at the university. Unlike most other CSUs, CSUN requires two diversity courses<sup>4</sup>. Recently, Chancellor Timothy P. White issued a new mandate that would only require one diversity class at CSUN instead of two. CSUN administrators are currently grappling with these system-wide changes in GE diversity requirements. The Chancellor issued these new requirements to allow smoother transfers for students who move from one CSU to another or who move from the CCCs to the CSUs. He also hopes the change will increase graduation rates and address achievement gaps across CSUs.

CSUN’s diversity requirements date back to the early 1980s. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a faculty task force spent three years debating new GE requirements for CSUN (Broesamle). Debates ranged from consideration of identical GE requirements to a proposal that all GE courses be interdisciplinary (Broesamle). The changes included a lab requirement for Natural Sciences GE courses as well as a minimum of nine units of GE upper division courses (Broesamle). Important for this dissertation, these changes included the mandate of two cross-cultural courses (Broesamle). This addition came a few years after CSUN created Afro-

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<sup>4</sup> The CSUN diversity GE courses are labeled as ‘Comparative Cultural Studies.’ They include courses such as Asian American Women, Gender and Media, Perspectives in Queer Studies, and Cities of the Developing World.

American (now Africana) and Mexican American (now Chicano/Chicana) Studies. These cross-cultural requirements provided a path for these departments to succeed.

Since these requirements provide entry points to these departments, some faculty believe lessening these requirements means taking away a key part of CSUN's identity. After campus-wide protests by students and faculty, CSUN administrators turned to a faculty GE taskforce that created multiple options for the GE requirement. The goal of this taskforce was to minimize the impact on departments such as gender and women's studies and Chicano studies. In the end, the requirement of two diversity courses remains, with some minor, but some critics say impactful, changes. First, transfer students who pass a transfer credit evaluation do not need to take the diversity courses at CSUN. Although this would not have an immediate impact, as students who started college in the fall of 2019 transfer to CSUN from community college or another CSU, this would mean less need for these courses in the future. Second, the course selection for this GE diversity category dwindled from 138 to 70 courses. Since CSUN relies on contingent faculty to teach many GE courses, they might be disproportionately affected by this. Adding to this, departments that rely on enrollment of these GE courses to help fund their departments, including Chicana and Chicano Studies and Africana Studies, might be disproportionately affected. This research could illustrate some of the initial blowback from these changes.

Similar to many projects created within the neoliberal academic world, this chapter feels rushed. Every chance I come back to it, I want to add another source or flesh out an argument. But, at a certain point, the historiography must stop in order to begin the ethnographic chapters. Throughout the rest of this dissertation, I come back to history to illustrate how the time and space I am in shifts the effects of neoliberal academia. At other parts of this work, the reader

might notice how time and space holds no power against the squeeze of neoliberalism. Still, I use my precious time to finish it.

Chapter Three: Shedding the Shards of Expectations: My Negotiation Between Neurodivergency, Whiteness, and a Working – Class Identity Within GE Diversity Courses

In my first year of contingency, I began having vivid, anxiety-ridden dreams. Oftentimes, these dreams strike when I feel relatively okay with where I am at on my management of the huge levels of stress that come with any position in neoliberal academia, contingent or not. They serve as a reminder of my abnormality, of my inability to fit into a place that insists on following specific tracks in a certain amount of time. My body feels torn apart as I am pushed, pulled, and molded into the right kind of faculty member. While I could continue to try to find the right words to describe this affective response to neoliberal expectations, one of the first dreams during contingency provides the best visualization of this process.

*I am walking through a maze of hallways. My left arm holds too many books and my shoulder feels the weight of this overload. But what sets this dream apart from all others is that my skin is mirrored and it is glass. As I move, I begin to see cracks in the glass. It hurts. The broken glass digs into my skin. So I pull at one of the large shards. The feeling is similar to the imagined feeling a child has of a bandage coming off of their skin. I can feel every single pull, I can see each part of the shard peeling away from my skin. I wake up before seeing what the peeled shard reveals underneath. I wake up with heart palpitations and a deep sense of dread about the day. I feel physically exhausted and I can still feel some of the pain from the dream.*

I wrote this reflection four years after the dream, as part of my attempt to understand a diagnosis of anxiety and depression given to me two years ago. As I wrote it, my body responded with goose bumps and a stomach knot. The dream, and the feelings immediately following it,

stick with me. In this chapter, I am interested in how my white identity, neurodivergency, and working-class background intersect to impact how I feel about my position as a contingent faculty who teaches diversity courses. While neoliberal academia attempts to push, pull, and break me into a faculty member that fits its worldview, I attempt to resist, sometimes out of necessity. The squeeze of neoliberal academia makes survival of some neurodivergent<sup>5</sup> individuals close to impossible. If academia values diversity in their professorship, they must move away from neoliberal academia in order to make room for neurodivergency, especially in diversity courses. This autoethnographic chapter uses feminist, queer, and disability studies works on difference and diversity in order to show the difficulty that comes with being neurodivergent in neoliberal academia while teaching GE diversity courses. I also offer ways these works help me cope within this space. Throughout this chapter, I illustrate how my multiple subjectivities impact how I negotiate teaching diversity courses as a contingent faculty. While the exploitation of contingent faculty should be considered in all parts of neoliberal academia, this exploitation uniquely impacts how contingent faculty prepare, experience, and think through choices they make when dealing with difficult subjects. My experience offers one glimpse at this experience.

### **Autoethnography section**

The lack of space for neurodivergent faculty in neoliberal academia must be explored in multiple ways. I see feminist and queer autoethnography as one necessary entry point to this issue because of their call to explore the emotional, affective, and individual effects of systemic issues. This methodology invites the exploration of ways the personal as political is shaped by

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<sup>5</sup> Neurodivergent serves as a broad category that represents those who deal with behavioral and/or mental disorders, including anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and those on the autism spectrum. I have chosen this word because I fit into this categorization in multiple ways.

the world and, concurrently, shapes the world. When trying to better explain what makes some autoethnographies feminist, Elizabeth Ettore (2017) writes, “Autoethnography situates the individual in a matrix of always already political activities as one passes through myriad, cultural experiences” (para 4). The utilization of feminist and queer autoethnography allows me to share my personal experience as a way to shape how others view contingency in academia. It also provides me with the platform to add nuance to an experience, opening up possibilities of what contingency as a neurodivergent faculty member looks like when teaching diversity courses.

Before exploring feminist and queer autoethnography in more detail, it is important to situate autoethnography within ethnography. As this dissertation is primarily ethnographic, the introduction of this dissertation explores feminist ethnography in detail. For this chapter, I want to pinpoint a few aspects of feminist ethnography that might illuminate why I have chosen to write one autoethnographic chapter. Dána-Ain Davis and Christa Craven (2016) write, “...feminist ethnography attends to the dynamics of power in social interaction that starts from a gender analysis” (9). The call to attend to power dynamics implores me to choose autoethnography as part of this research because it provides a chance to do the kind of deep reflection about pedagogy that I am inviting other contingent faculty to engage in. My engagement in this process does not, and cannot, place me on the same level as those involved in my project, but it does provide opportunities for me to add a layer to the experiences of contingent faculty that I might not be able to receive from others. For example, this chapter explores how my neurodivergency intersects with gendered expectations, racial expectations, and socioeconomic class expectations relate to my identity negotiation as an instructor who teaches courses where these types of intersections, and others, are brought to the forefront. Without my



personal experience with neurodivergency, I might not have considered the importance of these intersections in facilitating (or failing to facilitate) in the classroom.

Adding to this, Davis and Craven cite multiple feminist researchers who see personal experience as a necessary aspect of the research process. Many feminist ethnographers choose to show their personal connection to their research by writing about their path to the chosen topic. Most also prioritize reflexivity in their research to maintain a personal connection throughout the writing of their project. Importantly, a feminist ethnographic project should center the experience of others rather than the experience of the researcher. This call to be personal, but not overly personal, is an important reason why I have chosen one autoethnographic chapter rather than an entire autoethnographic project. In the beginning stages of this project, I had hoped to do an autoethnographic project, but an intersectional feminist perspective pushed me to explore a multitude of experiences of contingent faculty who teach diversity courses.

Feminist and queer autoethnographers inform my autoethnographic methods in this chapter. Carolyn Ellis (2003) describes autoethnography as a method that intertwines the personal with the cultural, social, and the political. In her autoethnographic project that explores teaching the method, she writes, “Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: First they look through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations” (37). According to Ellis, autoethnography provides a space for emotion, embodiment, and introspection written through the use of literary conventions.

Since autoethnographic work takes many different forms, I want to provide a few examples to illustrate why this chapter takes a particular form. In “Putting the Body on the Line,” Marilyn Metta (2013) uses autoethnography to illustrate her experience with domestic violence

on two levels. First, she tells her story as a woman who has dealt with domestic violence. Second, she narrates what it is like to be a psychotherapist who works with others who have been affected by domestic violence. She combines her feminist perspective with philosophy on mindfulness in order to show how she walks through the difficult terrain of her recovery and the recovery of others. She invites readers to walk with her on her “journey of embodied writing and recovery” (488). In order to do this, she uses art, poetry, and journal entries as examples of ways she navigates her path.

She describes herself as a feminist ethnographer who has answered the feminist call for more women in the margins to shape the way others understand their experience. She writes, “As contemporary feminist scholars, we are constantly wrestling with how we create knowledges in an era where personal stories collide with the cultural, the historical, the political, the embodied, and the imaginary; where the meanings we create out of stories are contested, re-invented, revised, and continually re-written to align and realign with emerging life scripts of our selves and our place in the world” (491). For Metta, feminist autoethnography provides writers with the space to show they are the authority on their lives. To me, adding ‘feminist’ to autoethnography means I must be studying a part of my life that is misunderstood, misrepresented, or overlooked, by others as well as one’s self. With this chapter, I have the opportunity to mold the way readers understand (1) contingent faculty with neurodivergency and (2) the way those who teach diversity courses in academia could learn from this experience.

Another way I use Metta’s understanding of feminist autoethnography is through the focus on embodiment. In order to discuss my experiences as a contingent faculty member who teaches GE diversity courses, I must mention different ways my negotiations influence the way I embody this position. Metta writes, “Autoethnographic writing creates critical spaces for

dialogical, inter-relational and intersectional exchanges to be made between the storyteller/storymaker, her lived and embodied experiences, and the readers/viewers” (494). A focus on embodiment allows for a nuanced portrayal of my experiences. I hope this nuance provides a space for the reader to see the nuance in the experiences of others.

Queer autoethnographies add to my attempt at nuance by providing works that open up possibilities for the identities they are considering. In *Disidentifications*, José Esteban Muñoz explores ways queers of color negotiate a heteronormative world that evolves around whiteness. Disidentification provides some with a way to negotiate how the dominant culture sees them with how they see themselves. Muñoz writes, “...disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” (31). In order to illustrate this, he examines how the performances of queers of color become performative, pushing against the dominant culture. He moves from performances in film and the art world to mainstream performances on MTV to show the variety of ways queers of color disidentify. These disidentifications allow for audiences to see other versions of the present and future.

Muñoz uses Richard Fung’s film *My Mother’s Place* (1991) as one example. Muñoz describes the film as one that not only shows the disidentification of queer identity, but also one of hybridity. Muñoz writes, “...identity practices such as queerness and hybridity are not a priori sites of contestation but, instead, spaces of productivity where identity’s fragmentary nature is accepted and negotiated” (79). Muñoz sees Fung’s film as one that works against ethnographic portrayals of native Others as well as pornographic portrayals of Asian queerness. He calls autoethnography a method that disrupts colonial images and representations, worrying easy

binaries. Adding to this, Muñoz believes the queer trend of autobiographical documentary and other autoethnographic efforts provide opportunity of placing the past in relationship to the present. This is especially important for queers of color as they have been disproportionately marginalized by dominant tellings of history, including queer history.

Although Fung’s autoethnographic work and this chapter are on very different topics, the possibilities of autoethnography observed by Muñoz guides me in the way I use my previous experience to inform this chapter. He writes, “Autoethnography is not interested in searching for some lost and essential experience, because it understands the relationship that subjects have with their own pasts as complicated yet necessary fictions” (83). With this chapter, I use my journal to work through my experience of teaching diversity courses as a contingent faculty member with mental health struggles who already felt out of place because of my working-class background. While my journal provides a reference for previous struggles, it does not provide me with the truth of my experience or the experience of others. Rather than essentializing contingent faculty with mental health, I present this chapter as one that is about the struggle of how expectations of neoliberal academia influenced, and continues to influence, my particular experience as contingent faculty.

### **Disability, Whiteness, Precarity, and Possibility in Neoliberal Academia**

As noted in the introduction of this dissertation, I aim to take an intersectional approach to the precarious position of contingent faculty. Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1989; 1991) conceptualization of intersectionality finds black women face interlocking forms of oppression placing uniquely difficult barriers for them to work against in order to receive equal recognition in the courtroom. In her original understanding, Crenshaw saw intersectionality as a metaphor that helps others understand how identities interlock to create unique, unequal situations for these

women. In *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, Patricia Hill Collins encourages (2019) intersectional scholars to move the concept closer to a theory that assists with social change. To this end, she suggests intersectional work must be dialogical, approaching experience as one informed by the systems influence on the individual and vice versa. The autoethnographic nature of this chapter aims to further theoretical understandings of intersectionality by providing one attempt at this dialogical approach. I show what it feels like to be caught doing diversity work within neoliberal academia.

Collins believes additive frameworks provide intersectionality with an opportunity to grow. She writes, “Additive approaches often signal what’s missing, revealing how the absence of race, gender, sexuality, and similar categories compromises a particular study, theory, or set of practices” (227). With this chapter, I am offering a few interlocking categories to the understanding of labor within neoliberal academia: white, working class, and neurodivergent. Specifically, white and working class combined with neurodivergency is an interlocking identity that is underrepresented in research on experience in academia. These parts of my positionality interlock to (dis)allow my feelings of adequacy in neoliberal academia, specifically in diversity courses where these categories are brought to the forefront by students as well as myself.

An intersectional approach to any work is, and should be, messy. It is an attempt to make sense of a million little shards of glass stuck onto one body. In order to make a bit of sense of this mess, I have chosen to separate my experience into a few themes. First, I center whiteness in relation to neurodivergency to better understand how my white identity helps and hinders the way I interact in neoliberal academia. Second, I offer my experiences as a contingent faculty who struggles with their mental health, especially as it relates to the precarious nature of

contingency. Finally, I show ways my experience affects me affectively, forcing me, and the system, to slow down.

### *Whiteness and Neurodivergency*

In a letter addressed to white disability studies and ableist institutions of higher education, Angel Miles, Akemi Nishida, and Anjali J. Forber-Pratt (2017) call for a critical intersectional disability studies that centers marginalized people with disabilities. Part of this call includes efforts of acknowledging ways we “are all embedded in – thus perpetuate and internalize – systems of oppression and work collectively to dismantle them” (para 3). To answer this call, I find it important to explore ways I embody whiteness as well as ways my neurodivergency works against this embodiment. My struggle with whiteness and my white identity is, perhaps, the most difficult shard of glass to peel away, as it is something deeply embedded within my skin. This struggle is especially difficult within a system that centers whiteness, even as it attempts to prioritize diversity through its curriculum. To start this section, I briefly explore the category of disability as well as the stigma that comes with being seen in this category. Then, I illustrate how my experience as a white woman with an invisible disability maneuvers in neoliberal academia. Finally, I offer a few perspectives from non-white disability scholars to show how race influences their experience in somewhat different ways.

Before elaborating on my particular experience, I want to broaden this conversation to illustrate ways society stigmatizes those who deal with neurodivergency or any other disability. These stigmas influence the way I navigate my classrooms. They also affect how others might see me. In *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Alison Kafer (2013) offers insight into ways society disallows a future that includes those with disabilities. She writes, “The presence of disability...signals something else: a future that bears too many traces of the ills of the present to be bearable” (2).

When able-bodied individuals are confronted with those with disabilities, they only look for ways to fix the person, to make the person more able to function in society. If a person loses the ability to walk because of an accident, some focus on rehabilitation to help them get closer to the person they used to be. If a person receives an HIV diagnosis, some hide it to appear as if nothing is wrong. If a fetus might be born with Down syndrome, some consider aborting the child because of the cost (financial and emotional) of raising this child. While Kafer understands why one might make these types of decisions, she hopes for a future where society offers support for those who cannot, or do not want to, choose these routes.

It is probably unsurprising to find I also hope for this type of future. In order to arrive at a place where society supports disability rather than simply accepts and/or tries to fix it, Kafer suggests making disability more political. From this perspective, the problem of disability becomes less focused on an individual relying on the medical field to help them get closer to able-bodied. Instead, the problem resides “in built environments and social patterns that exclude or stigmatize particular kinds of bodies, minds, and ways of being” (6). To be clear, Kafer is not asking for a world where medical fixes are not possible. She simply wants a world where medical fixes are not necessary for functioning in society. In order to achieve this goal, she invites criticism of the current understanding of disability. She also encourages bringing disability to the forefront of discussions surrounding identity, as it is an important way individuals negotiate who they are in society.

In this deconstruction of society’s understanding of disability, Kafer believes society will find that disability is not binary. Kafer understands the category of disability as broad, including those with physical disabilities, chronic illnesses, sensory impairments, mental illnesses, and those with HIV/AIDS. She also recognizes that by opening up the conversation on disability,

societal perceptions on those under this umbrella might shift. When considering these shifts in understanding of disability, she attunes herself to ways gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other parts of identity might influence who is included (or not) in these shifts. She writes, "...part of the work of imagining this kind of expansive disability movement is to simultaneously engage in critical reading of these very identities, locations, and bodies" (12). In her book, Kafer considers a number of contexts to imagine this movement. For the context of neoliberal academia, this engagement means considering how disability intertwines with other parts of one's identity in relation to their position within the system.

Although many parts of my identity influence this experience, I see whiteness as the most necessary to explore. I want to use two examples to show how my struggles with whiteness, contingency, and my mental health show themselves in diversity courses. I want to start with the obvious: my white skin provides me with a level of agency to be political that those who are not white do not always possess. I can answer Kafer's call to make disability political because many read my skin tone as neutral. Typically, I reveal I have a disability on the first day, as I discuss access to resources for others with disabilities. Because of my skin tone, I can be read as brave for revealing my struggles with mental health rather than as someone who is taking up one more advantage given to them by the education system. Adding to this, since my disability is invisible, when I discuss disability in future classes, it is easier for students to forget my personal investment in the conversation. They revert back to thinking of me as a neutral (white) woman instructor.

Although I do my best to be aware of how my white skin influences the way I talk about mental health, I must admit that I sometimes let my privilege get away from me. I allow myself



to be seen as a supercrip<sup>6</sup> that can do it all. In *The Possessive Investment of Whiteness*, George Lipsitz (2018) calls race “the core contradiction of neoliberal society” (xxvii). He continues, “The neoliberal policies, practices, and pedagogies that pervade contemporary society simultaneously require both the deployment and the disavowal of race” (xxvii). Through the use of mission statements as well as the mandate of GE diversity courses, neoliberal academia brands itself as a place that values diversity. At the same time, neoliberal academia does little to make room for the diverse population interpellated into it. Lipsitz describes whiteness as an identity that many whites invest in. One might invest in whiteness directly, by degrading people of color or supporting white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. One might also invest in whiteness indirectly, by participating in a system that allows white communities to accumulate assets easier than communities of color. Lipsitz states a disinvestment of whiteness includes antiracist identities and a divestment of white supremacy.

Although my investment in whiteness was not purposeful, I spent the first few decades being rewarded for my investment in it. I remained quiet when I looked around at my first university and did not hear or see the diversity that was promised. I chose not to heavily engage with other students when I went back to school to finish my first degree because of work priorities. It was not until my master’s program that I began seriously considering how different experiences impacted how individuals interacted with each other. At this point, my cohort and I engaged in deep, meaningful, and difficult conversations about our experiences. Around this time, I began to disinvest in whiteness. I took on an anti-racist perspective and I brought that to my classroom.

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<sup>6</sup> Eli Clare (2009) describes the super cripp as a dominant image of disabled people. She writes, “They focus on disable people “overcoming” our disabilities. They reinforce the superiority of the nondisabled body and mind. They turn individual disabled people, who are simply leading their lives, into symbols of inspiration” (2).

This anti-racist perspective trickled into an anti-ism perspective. Despite this, I find myself accidentally falling into the trap of my former investment in whiteness. Although I do not have a journal entry about these experiences, I occasionally feel myself doing this as an instructor and I try to catch myself. This entry below is my imagined journal entry after one of these experiences.

*Today, one of my students came to visit me during office hours. They shared with me their struggles with mental health, explaining this was why they missed so many classes. They also mentioned they had chosen to get help, telling me that one of the reasons they did this was because I am so open about mental health in the classroom. As they continued talking, I felt my heart grow big in my chest, but I also felt my shoulders relax a bit. I felt important.*

Part of me knows (hopes?) that my affective response was out of concern for my student. I am always happy to have a positive impact on them. However, if I am honest, it makes me feel good to be an example of success that they can look up to. The super crip combined with the white savior complex<sup>7</sup> presents me with a dangerous path that I need to be careful of choosing, especially when teaching courses focused on diversity. When I choose this path I reinforce a stereotype that is not easy for many with disabilities to achieve, especially those who are marginalized on multiple levels, because society is not set up for this type of achievement. Although I try to disinvest in whiteness, the comfortability of it makes it easier to be tricked back into it.

On the other hand, my disabilities place me at odds with expectations of whiteness, which leads me to be tough on myself when my disabilities show themselves without my permission. In

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<sup>7</sup> The white savior narrative is a narrative trope found in films such as *The Help*, *Dances With Wolves*, and many, many others. Linda Martin Alcoff (2015) describes these films as those where whites are the leaders fighting against racism, with the marginalized groups as an afterthought.

*Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed (2006) describes whiteness as a way of being in the world that places things within one's reach. I have chosen to invest in whiteness because it makes things easier to accomplish, but I have also chosen to invest in whiteness because I had little choice not to as someone with an undiagnosed disability for many years. Ahmed writes, "...certain lines might be followed because of a lack of resources to support a life of deviation, because of commitments they have already made, or because the experience of disorientation is simply too shattering to endure" (176). I played along for many years. I chose paths that allowed me to mask my disorientation.

Then I landed in neoliberal academia, an environment that thrives on white normativity. When my disabilities reveal themselves, my investments in it turn into losses because I am seen to be someone who does not quite fit into the normativity of whiteness, and, therefore, does not fit into neoliberal academia. Although my disabilities are mostly invisible, they are sometimes audible. When I am having especially anxious or depressed days, I struggle finding the correct words and occasionally stutter. When I invested in whiteness, I began investing in a system that molded individuals to believe are responsible for their success and failures, not the system. Lipsitz describes whiteness as a "way of knowing and perceiving the world that teaches people to live with evil" (261). One mechanism that allows this to happen is "a methodological individualism that portrays social relations as the sum total of acts by individuals, not the product of interactions within complex practices, processes, systems, and structures" (261). This is where whiteness intertwines with neoliberal academia. The shared focus on individualism provides a platform for whiteness to maintain its place at the top of the racial hierarchy. However, when one invests in a system that places the blame on individuals rather than the system, other parts of their identity that do not fit becomes a problem. When I stutter, or take some time to think

through my words, I come down on myself for lack of preparation or for simply not being good enough to lead the classroom. Through my years of journaling, I can see how this expectation of doing well despite a system that does not always allow this shows itself when I cannot control my disabilities in the classroom. After a particularly hard anxiety day, I wrote:

*Last week, I stuttered in front of my students because I didn't know how to correct a racist response from one of them. I did my best and the rest of the class just went to shit from there. I didn't have the energy to keep the class going.*

When I find I cannot force my body into the whiteness mold, I become disoriented. I am flustered because I know I have been revealed to be a fraud in an environment where a better model is waiting to fill my shoes. When considering this in relation to diversity courses, these courses are much more likely to have space for calling in those who possess racist (or ableist or sexist or...), but I have convinced myself that when my disabilities show I have lost the power to facilitate these conversations.

In order to add another intersectional layer on this exploration of mental health in academia, I need to consider how bodies different than mine might negotiate this space. In their autoethnographic work on disclosing disability in graduate school, Angela M. Carter, R. Tina Catania, Sam Schmitt, and Amanda Swenson (2017) provide glimpses into their experiences with micro- and macro-aggressions after disclosing their invisible disabilities. They begin their piece by identifying ways neoliberal academia is physically, socially, and temporally ableist. Although much of the text explores general problems with ableism in neoliberal academia, their discussion reveals brief glimpses of specific experiences based on their positionalities. I want to mention a few in order to better explain how these experiences might impact an instructor in a diversity course. Catania identifies ways her identity as an immigrant compounds the pressure of

disclosing disability in academia. Her family expresses shame, pity, and concern when she reveals her disability. As an academic with a working class background who also has white privilege, my choice to write about my disability comes with some hesitation, but not the same type of hesitation that might come with the added pressure of being from an immigrant family who wants their child to show others their potential to add to the United States.

Gender also plays a role in this negotiation. As a trans man, Schmitt describes his process with negotiating disability in academia as one that is dependent on his expression of both whiteness and masculinity. As he gets closer to perform a white masculine norm, his disability becomes more invisible. Instead, academics read him as confident, intelligent, and capable. The point here is not to say it is more or less easy to perform these negotiations, but to provide glimpses into different parts of identity that might influence why I feel the way I do and to better understand how I choose to reveal (or not) my disability in the classroom.

### *Mental Health and Contingency*

Until graduate school, it never occurred to me that my mental health might influence my academics, mostly because, without health insurance, I had been living with undiagnosed mental health issues all of my life. After a semester of contingent work without health care, I found a contingent position that also covered health care. That semester, I saw a doctor for the first time in probably 10 years. Soon, I began talking to her about the unending anxiety and chronic fatigue that I thought came with the career. One particularly hard month, my partner noticed I had started grinding my teeth. I also came home most days in tears. At this point, I decided I was not acting normally. I talked to my doctor and began taking medication to minimize my intense anxiety and help with my mild depression. Therapy was also suggested, but since I was teaching

on two different campuses and had hundreds of students on my hands, I could not swing it. Still, the medication helped. I stopped grinding my teeth. I got closer to “normal.”

As someone from a working class, single-parent family, I had only been to the doctor a handful of times before I left home. For most of my life, my mother did not have health insurance, so she could not afford to take me for regular visits. I only went for emergencies and for required vaccinations. My working-class roots also impact how I understand mental illness. Improving mental health is seen as a luxury in my family, even today. Although alcoholism and other addictions are rampant in my family, they are seen as both something you did to yourself and as something you should not need a doctor to help you with. As my white, working class identity intertwines with my mental health diagnosis, I feel myself pulled in different directions. Sometimes, I feel ashamed that I cannot overcome mental health on my own. Other times, I want to share my struggles with my family to help them navigate their own issues. Always, I am tired of not knowing exactly how I feel.

I start this section with my mental health diagnosis because it illustrates the importance of the particular contingent job I hold. Without the guaranteed health insurance that CSUs offer their part-time faculty who teach over three units, I probably would not be writing about my struggles with mental health in neoliberal academia. Instead, I would have left academia after that first year. This diagnosis allowed me to better understand why I felt shattered into a million pieces on a regular basis. It explained why my chest feels like it could collapse throughout the semester. Some contingent faculty members are not lucky enough to have access to a doctor. Some work at three, four, or five universities, traveling all over their region, with no benefits. As a contingent faculty at CSUN, I am positioned highly compared to many others throughout the United States. Although I recognize this position, I still choose to speak to how contingency uniquely impacts

one who struggles with mental health because it helps keep the shards together. When dealing with this while also teaching GE diversity courses, it can become close to impossible to negotiate one's role without breaking at some point. On another level, my working class, white identity pulls at me to stop complaining, keep my head down, and continue to work hard. Talking about mental health is not part of that work.

As I share my experience with negotiating disability as a contingent faculty member, I want to consider what the negotiation mental health pedagogically as well as academically looks like for other types of faculty by turning to scholarship on these experiences. In *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Ann Cvetkovich (2011) describes depression as ordinary in order to highlight the banal aspects that come with the everyday embodiment of this experience. With this treatment of depression, she hopes, "to let depression linger, to explore the feeling of remaining or resting in sadness without insisting that it be transformed or reconceived" (14). Her work offers a slower, deeper examination of how neoliberalism affects individuals. While she recognizes the usefulness of exploring abstract effects of neoliberalism (such as permanent war and security states), she identifies everyday affective life as an alternative approach that might help add texture to macro explorations of the effects of neoliberalism.

Throughout this work, Cvetkovich provides slow-motion video rather than snapshots of lived experience of depression. Cvetkovich begins *Depression* with some insight on her experience dealing with depression as an academic in her work. Cvetkovich uses her personal journals during this experience to elucidate the everyday, lived experience of the effects of neoliberalism. Before transitioning to her journals, she provides a memo on "being stuck" where she situates herself as an academic who struggles with depression. She feels as if neoliberal academic environments provide pressure on multiple levels from writing a dissertation to finding a job to

writing that book for tenure to finding life balance to...to...to. Adding to this, she writes, “Academia breeds particular forms of panic and anxiety leading to what gets called depression – the fear that you have nothing to say, or that you can’t say what you want to say, or that you have something to say but it’s not important enough or smart enough” (18). Cvetkovich believes this leads academics to feel they need to manage their depression or, if they do not, they have failed again. At least part of this work shows itself as a way Cvetkovich has learned to manage her depression. She avoids failure by writing about the possibility of failure.

Cvetkovich’s suggestion that academics become anxious and depressed about their offerings in the classroom rings true to my experience. Typically, in my GE diversity courses, my students and I have a honeymoon period. I use the first few weeks to allow the students to get to know those they will be sharing difficult discussions with for the next few months. Although my anxiety is high, I find my anxiety is lower at this point compared to later in the semester. In the third week, we begin the tough conversations. Depending on the class, these conversations might be those on identity and power. Or on types of feminist movements. Or toxic masculinity. Immediately, my mood shifts and sometimes I even dread going to class. This is where the pressure begins to hit me. I begin worrying about saying the wrong thing or my students saying the wrong thing and me failing to navigate the conversation correctly.

Sometimes, I can hide these anxieties relatively well. I might not be as quick on my feet, but I manage to get through a class with little incident. Other times...

*Today a fellow lecturer had to give me medicine to stop my mild anxiety attack before my long teaching day. I walked into the office relatively quiet, with my voice weak and my body shaking. I thought I had masked it, but when my colleague asked if I was okay, my heart began pounding hard. I felt dizzy. She*



*offered some medication that might help slow my heart rate so I could get through the day. Typically, I would have said no, too afraid of interactions with my prescriptions, but I couldn't go to class like this and I couldn't cancel. I took it. Although a bit loopy, I survived the day.*

Although this happens every semester, I always feel like I have walked into a wall when I get so nervous after the first few weeks. Cvetkovich's work provides some idea of this, but I want to add another layer to how neoliberal academia might shape contingent faculty who teach diversity courses in unique ways. I believe the weeks after the honeymoon period is when the precarious nature of my position truly hits me. In a speech given at Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Judith Butler (2009) defines precarity as a "politically induced position in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (ii). She describes this position as one of "maximized vulnerability" where the state does not offer necessary protection (ii). Butler uses gender norms as an entry point for understanding precarity because those who do not operate within the constraints of these roles live a precarious life that includes danger of harassment and violence.

As a contingent faculty who identifies as queer, but who might be read as differently (less threatening) than those who are not white and cisgender, I am fully aware that the precarity I feel is different from those Butler discusses in her speech. The precarity around losing a job is not the same as threats of physical violence and harassment. Although I have never gotten close enough to attempt it, occasional thoughts of suicide flow through my mind on those especially difficult weeks. I tell myself that I have achieved so much, perhaps this is where I peak. Perhaps this is good enough. Unfortunately, unlike the physical violence, legal threats, or harassment other

precarious types might face, outsiders are not able to identify when I might have been placed in a dangerous position. It is difficult to teach diversity courses, where it is necessary to talk about various precarious conditions, while also being in a precarious position of my own. This is especially true when I am also having a bad mental health day. Regularly, the topics discussed in class remind me that my position is decent compared to others. And it becomes even more difficult to understand why I am still depressed.

Butler links precarity with performativity in that those who are non-compliant with gender roles can utilize performativity to be recognized, or at least as close to being recognized as possible. Butler says, “The performativity of gender has everything to do with who counts as a life, who can be read or understood as a living being, and who lives, or tries to live, on the fair side of established modes of intelligibility” (iv). She goes on to describe ways undocumented immigrants work to be recognized as citizens without having citizenship. For example, in 2006, protestors in Los Angeles sang the National Anthem in both English and Spanish. This allowed them to participate in a behavior that is seen as American. At the same time, the choice to also sing this in Spanish allowed them to push against those who felt threatened by Americans speaking the Spanish language.

While performativity clearly provides a path to closer recognition and, perhaps, inclusion, those with invisible disabilities might find it harder to be recognized. We cannot always choose a particular act to help make us a little more seen. In fact, sometimes if we choose to be performative with our disabilities, some might read our actions as searching for pity. And, in other instances, certain actions might look like happy accidents or they may make the person look over prepared, not as if I had to over prepare to help feel confident enough to avoid stuttering.

It is not always easy to be seen with an invisible disability, but, in the classroom, I'm much less worried about being seen and much more worried about how I am seen. With my disability, I have to be more careful with my words and actions in the classroom, which I see as useful in all courses, but this is especially true in those diversity courses that attempt to dismantle power structures. However, this feeling also sends me into a spiral if the class goes 'wrong.'

*Today was a particularly hard day. I felt attacked by a student.... I became flustered and so frustrated that I even said something sarcastic at some point, indirectly trying to hurt him. It becomes very difficult when I feel attacked to be able to respond. I feel bad my students suffer, but they also don't seem to understand I am human.*

During this class, I felt myself get hot and I could not stop thinking about how awful this exchange went. I had to keep teaching the class, but I left the class with only vague memories of what happened after the exchange.

Of course, part of the reason why I found this exchange difficult is I did know I needed to prepare myself for something like this. It was a prime example of how uncontrollable the classroom is, even if you do everything in your power to control it. This is especially true of diversity courses, where instructors talk about constantly evolving issues that are sometimes impossible to keep up with. At the same time, since I was new, I felt the pressure to be perfect with this navigation. If I did something wrong, and if a student complained or too many gave me a bad review, that would go on my teaching record. It might not mean the end of my teaching career, but it could mean I would be deemed as ineffective at these particular courses. As difficult as these courses are to teach, I needed to be able to teach them because they are the ones departments typically need contingent faculty to cover. If I appeared to fail at the difficult

conversations necessary in these courses, I would be eliminating my name off the list of the ever-dwindling list of courses available for instructors like me.

After incidents like this, I spend at least a week lingering on how I could have navigated the exchange better. I do my best to train my mind to focus on the mounting amount of work I have, but, instead, I find myself back to this exchange. And, on the lucky occasion where I train myself to stop focusing on the exchange, I *never* let it go every time I see the student involved. All exchanges in and outside the classroom are affected by this short interaction that the student might not even remember. I become even more anxious about how I approach the classroom. Sometimes I become scared of the student, especially if this is a class where I do not have supportive students. Then, I fall into depression about the times I did not live up to my expectations.

*Currently feeling very down about today's discussion. We talked about women and mental/physical health and I just didn't know where to go with it. Sometimes I think the students just don't care and it's so draining. I hate that I need to motivate them in order to get them to stay with me.*

In "Teaching/Depression," Eve Sedgwick (2006) believes the kind of work that comes with feminist research and pedagogy might have a relationship with depressive characteristics. Sedgwick turns to Silvan Tomkins's work on depressiveness to better understand her pedagogical experience. She deems this "a recipe for overachievement in general and for pedagogical intensity in particular" (2). She describes depressiveness as oscillating between an attentive adult and a sweet anxious child. Of seeing this in the classroom, she writes, "...sometimes I feel like my students' analyst; other times, floundering all too visibly in my helplessness to evoke language from my seminar, I feel like a patient being held out on by 20

psychoanalysts at once” (3). This tension between guiding the students and allowing them to guide her illustrates the agency a faculty member who deals with depression might offer some of their students. Sometimes, I forget that helplessness is part of the process, at least for those who struggle with depression. In a diversity course, if I lean towards the patient end of things, students have the opportunity to work together to build an understanding of the important similarities and differences that exist between the various groups we discuss. I just need to work on allowing myself to slip into the role of the patient.

Unfortunately, this patient/analysis tension is not typically ideal in the context of neoliberal academia. As education scholars such as Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) and Heller (2016) explain, the neoliberal setting places the students in the role of customer. The instructor, then, is placed into the role of customer service. Neoliberal academia trains students to expect this type of relationship. As much as I love to fall back on Sedgwick’s notions, I also feel a pull towards satisfying my students’ desires for their education. If I do not have the time or energy to give them my best, I feel like a failure. If they seem disappointed in my answers to tough questions, they are not getting what they want. And these thoughts send me deeper into a panicked and depressed state. Sedgwick’s work offers hope, but the demands of neoliberal academia diminished much of that hope.

### *Barriers and Their Effects*

In this section, I want to focus on the physical and mental effects of teaching a GE diversity course while also having depression and anxiety. These courses encourage challenge, but that challenge comes at a physical and mental cost, especially for those who struggle with mental health. Although I have broken my mirrored skin, I still reflect neoliberalism in it. As I continue to try to peel this reflection off, my body feels each shard coming off very, very slowly.

I start this section highlighting how barriers in neoliberal academia affect me. Then, I consider how neoliberal temporality creates particular pressure for those who struggle with mental health. Finally, I illustrate how concern for student satisfaction leads to added stress in an already pushed-to-the-limit body.

When discussing inclusion of non-normative bodies in diverse institutions, Sara Ahmed (2012) explains that many non-white and/or queer bodies hit brick walls as they try to shape their institutions to be more inclusive rather than simply diverse. She sees the institutionalization of diversity as a way neoliberal academia exploits marginalized faculty. Marginalized faculty are typically hired to make the university look diverse, but they are also there to do the work of diversity. Unfortunately, these faculty find the work they have been hired to perform is performative rather than constitutive; it is to show diversity happens rather than to allow for inclusion to be possible. Of these faculty, she writes, “They become conscious of “the brick wall,” as that which keeps its place even when an official commitment to diversity has been given” (174).

Mostly, Ahmed uses the brick wall as a metaphor, but she uses this metaphor because she heard multiple faculty refer to this process as banging their head against a brick wall. I want to use this metaphor to consider the physical results of this metaphorical head banging. I find these physical results in entry after entry.

*My brain feels jumbled and my back hurts.*

*I'm exhausted. My body aches.*

On the Supreme Court nomination of Brett Kavanaugh – *A lot of this seems like life or death and I am too tired to play devil’s advocate on an issue we should not be debating.*

*I’m dealing with a weird eye issue that has made me more distracted and has placed limits on the amount of work I can do.*

As I type these entries, I feel weird about sharing some of them. At the same time, it seems necessary to recognize ways the brick wall affects my body, but, more importantly, how my body creates its own defense mechanism that invites (or sometimes forces) me to stop. Ahmed writes, “Diversity practitioners not only come up against the wall, as that which does not move, they are often themselves encountered as the wall, as obstructing the movement of others” (186). Some diversity workers might become obstructions because they fight against institutionalized diversity. When my body can no longer hold the precarious nature of my job, I become an obstruction because institutionalized diversity has made me stop, or, at the very least, slow down.

This idea of slowing down is interesting because at the same time everything around me moves quickly, my brain functions in the opposite mode.

*My brain feels as slow as molasses. I feel myself stuttering through things I know very well. It makes me feel as if my students can’t trust me if they hear me stutter.*

It is hard to capture the way it feels for your brain to be moving too fast to catch up on some days and too slow to make sense of on others. Neoliberal academia institutionalizes time through the use of strict classroom schedules, learning outcomes for each semester, and deadlines. In *Time Binds*, Elizabeth Freeman (2010) explores how this usurping of time affects those who cannot, or do not want to, conform to neoliberal time. Freeman describes this concept of privileging a

certain orientation toward time as chrononormativity, or a way institutions use time to encourage maximum productivity of individuals within it.

Freeman uses obesity as an example of a body that might work against chrononormativity. With the help of Lauren Berlant's work on fatness, Freeman writes, "...fat" connotes a refusal of agency onward and upward (or perhaps, as in the far more respectable case of neurosis, inward and downward)" (location 2116). She describes this as "a move outward" that is "slow" and "childish." My depression and anxiety function in a similar way. Rather than moving a difficult conversation forward, I sometimes have to stop it. I, physically and mentally, cannot allow things to progress for the class on some days. I make the class wait for another day. Between class meetings, I am forced to look inward to prepare for the next session. And, I spend the time between classes reflecting on what went wrong. And, I cannot do the massive amount of work the other courses I teach require. And, then I feel like I am not giving the students the instructor they deserve.

The consideration of my students brings me to my last point on the physical effects of the body. In order to support this point, I turn to Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987). With this text, Anzaldúa explains the many parts of her mestiza identity. She shows how multiple parts of her identity push and pull her in contradicting ways. For example, her Mexican heritage condemns her lesbian identity while her academic life provides a space for her to live openly as a lesbian. These contradicting ways of seeing the world places her in a unique position where she is able to see how structural pressures influence seemingly superficial interactions.

Anzaldúa calls this position *la facultad*. It is a position that feels emotions, the more intense the emotion, the more receptive those with *la facultad* are to it. Of depression and other parts of the "dark, chthonic (underworld)," she writes, "Confronting anything that tears the fabric of our



everyday mode of consciousness and that thrusts us into a less literal and more psychic sense of reality increases awareness and la facultad” (61). This pinpoints what is perhaps the hardest part of teaching GE diversity courses while dealing with depression and anxiety. I am ultra-aware when my students are struggling with their feelings. When the class discusses difficult issues, I am not only feeling my emotions, but also those of my students. They come to me like darts and I cannot escape them. While neoliberal academia might want to frame this as a trait that makes one a better instructor, it truly makes me tired. However, as a contingent faculty member who has limited options for what I get to teach, it does not matter how tired I am. I say yes and fall into the cycle again. Until I hit another wall.

Although my Spanish is conversational at best, it is not lost on me that la facultad translates to the faculty. Sure, Anzaldúa refers to faculty as ways individuals see the world, but I also see parts of her suggestions in the choice to use contingent faculty as diversity workers. She writes, “when we’re up against the wall, when we have all sorts of oppressions coming at us, we are forced to develop this faculty so that we’ll know when the next person is going to slap us or lock us away” (60 – 61). Here it is again: the wall. Like Ahmed’s wall that stops diversity work from happening, Anzaldúa’s wall requires those up against it to develop protection. Contingent faculty who teach diversity courses serve as a buffer for other types of faculty. They get slapped before the rest of the faculty.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter shows how a neurodivergent contingent faculty who deals with the pain and pressure that comes with serving as a diversity buffer for the rest of the university. While it is true that my white identity makes this role easy on occasion, when my neurodivergency shows itself, my position begins to collapse. I move too slow or my mind races too fast. I start to stutter

or burst into tears. Whatever happens, I can no longer hold the weight of teaching diversity in a neoliberal setting where I reside in precarity. But somehow I keep holding on.

As I looked back over this essay to write this conclusion, I noticed how clearly neoliberal academia is not designed for someone who struggles with neurodivergency. In an essay on the anxieties created by neoliberal academia, Elissa Foster (2017) tells of her experience as a tenure-track faculty who is constantly reminded of the necessity of student satisfaction through the student evaluation process. If students evaluate her poorly, she may not advance to tenure. She writes, “When it comes time to perform my role as a professor there is no need for surveillance because I am already primed to gag myself” (Foster, 323). It is hard to challenge students when they play a role in advancing one’s career. This is even more true of contingent faculty. Not only do they share Foster’s anxieties, they must also deal with relatively limited room for growth and shared office space, if they are lucky enough to have office space at all. Unsurprisingly, Reeve and Deason (2014) suggest access these lack of resources have a negative impact on the mental health of contingent faculty.

While I spend quite a bit of time contemplating the intersection between contingency and neurodivergency as it relates to university diversity efforts, it is clear most universities do not. In her essay “The (S)paces of Academic Work: Disability, Access, and Higher Education,” Kristen Lindgren (2016) discusses her experience teaching a deaf student. Rather than creating a space where deafness was just one of many ways of experiencing the classroom, her university left this student out of their diversity efforts until a professor was faced with the challenge. Lindgren was not giving pedagogical training to support various ways of experiencing a classroom. After having this student, Lindgren challenged herself to broaden her pedagogical strategies to allow for more students to feel as if the classroom provides space for them to succeed. Unfortunately,

Lindgren's experience of lacking in tools to support deaf students, disabled students, or any other marginalized students is not uncommon. If a university is not willing to make space for these students, then how do faculty who share these identities fit into their diversity plans? This speaks to the larger issue of superficial efforts of diversity, where universities work to accept and hire diverse people, but do not shift their culture to make space for their multiple experiences.

Despite the lack of support by the university, I realized I was able to work with students and my colleagues to create a space where diversity engagement might happen. I had been doing this since my freshman year in college. As a first generation, white, working class college student, I had no idea how to do diversity and I did not get the impression any of my professors did either. Now, on the other side of the classroom, the unique ways my identities interlock to shape my pedagogical techniques provide me with an opportunity to show students the messiness of diversity. The imperfections that come with perspectives coming together sometimes make themselves known in my interactions with my students. In each microcosm of a classroom, the students and I work together to confront difficult issues and seemingly impossible questions. On my good days, even through the pain and the mental exhaustion, my students help hold some of the diversity weight placed upon me. Perhaps universities could learn from the experiences inside these diversity courses.

But this weight continues to pull me down as I move from my classroom to my office. And, many times, I find another group helping me carry diversity for the university: other contingent faculty. Some of them share the burden by teaching GE diversity courses like me. Others choose not to teach these courses, but know how challenging they are and so often they are there to hear me and our other colleagues when a particular challenge arises. We share de-

stressing strategies, essential oils, and, if need be, medication. Although our neoliberal system does not support us, we have carved out space for care work to help us survive.

While I could probably write this entire dissertation on my experience of neoliberal academia, the amount of support I receive from my colleagues calls me to hear from other contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses. Through this communication, I might find new defense mechanisms and coping strategies they create in order to survive. These interactions might also reveal how intersectional identities heavily impact how contingent faculty members interact differently while teaching these courses. The following chapters look at these experiences. I hope these chapters provide contingent faculty with ways of navigating a system that expects us to take on the diversity work while living through precarity.

## Chapter Four: Using Ethnography to Dissolve the Stickiness of Contingency: An Intersectional Feminist Exploration of Being Stuck in Contingency

No matter how much I feel I do not fit into academia, I have somehow managed to find myself stuck in it. I received my bachelor's degree in 2009, in the midst of a major recession. I attempted to use my degree to find work, but could only find a job in the service industry waiting tables. I did not mind the service industry, but I wanted a career that was promised to me by my time at the university. And, I needed health insurance. So, I applied and was accepted to a master's program. In this program, I began a position as a teaching associate where I taught public speaking and other lower division GE courses in order to help me pay my tuition. Upon graduation, I served as a Vista Corps summer associate in an attempt to utilize my knowledge to help shape my community in a positive way. When my summer position expired, I could not find another one. I was panicked about money and my wasted time in graduate school. One week before the beginning of the semester, the chair of my master's program asked me to teach some courses. My panic locked me into academia, as I was scared I might not get another opportunity. This first semester of contingency I taught and prepped four new courses, one of which was a GE course with ninety students. The next semester I taught at two separate schools with one new course. My ninety-student classroom increased to 120 students. On Mondays of this semester, I began teaching at 8am, commuted thirty miles to another university, and stopped teaching at 10pm.

When summer came, I had no idea if I would be teaching in the fall. I began considering other options. I applied to a number of jobs, but I noticed that I was overqualified educationally for many of the jobs, but under-qualified on the experience level of them. I never even got a call back. Luckily, I was given courses for the fall at one of my schools and with this semester came

health insurance. I decided to stop looking for other work and stick with contingency. My second year of contingency saw me in tears at least once a week and with unbearable anxiety all of the time. I was especially torn down by Intercultural Communication, a GE diversity course that requires students to confront their privileges and interrogate how power impacts their communication. I felt I did not know enough to be the leader of the class. So, I went back to school to earn my doctorate. Currently in my fifth year of my program, I feel a bit more confident about what I know and what I can teach, but I feel like there is even less of a space available in academia than there was before. So, I have started exploring my options outside of academia, but I hit the same block that pushes me back to contingency: I do not have the type of experience needed to be employable outside of a university. Although my graduate school offers a number of workshops and programs that help navigate careers outside of academia, my job has not given me time to take advantage of them. The deeper I become stuck in contingency, the harder it becomes to pull myself out.

I tell this story not because it is unique, but because it is common in contingency. Many want to get out, but do not have a path to do so. In this paper, I take an intersectional ethnographic approach in order to engage in order to engage with the stickiness of contingency. Patricia Hill Collins (2019) writes, “Race, gender, class, and other systems of power are constituted and maintained through relational processes, gaining meaning through the nature of these relationships” (46). The way contingent faculty are tossed to the side in most administrative decisions forms their understanding of who they are within the system. Adding to this, they are more likely to be members of marginalized groups than their less precarious peers (American Association of University Professors, 2014). While all contingent positions have their difficulties, I focus on those who teach General Education (GE) diversity courses because it is

hard to engage in difficult conversations about power and privilege when one worries about whether they might not have courses in the next semester. Contingent faculty serve as a linchpin for the diversity goals of our university, but it sometimes feels as if they could find another linchpin to replace us if we do not quite fit. This essay aims to understand how a contingent faculty member's positionality might make them bend, mold, break, and pop out of their position teaching GE diversity courses in neoliberal academia.

In *Feminist Activist Ethnography*, Christa Craven and Dána-Ain Davis (2013) suggest feminist ethnography is a form of resistance against neoliberalism. While they offer multiple ways of resisting through ethnography, this essay takes up their suggestion to interrogate the system. Specifically, I aim to see how it feels to be stuck in this system while also being so necessary to its survival. How do contingent faculty become stuck in this system? How do contingent faculty navigate this stickiness? What about diversity courses provide a deeper stickiness than others? What are ways to dissolve the adhesive that holds so many of us within this system? Throughout 2019 and 2020, I interviewed 20 contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses at CSUN in order to see where some might be tearing away from neoliberal academia and how others might be torn up by it. I present the frustrations and joys (and some in between) of contingent faculty who negotiate GE diversity courses while trying to understand my own position in the system.

Craven and Davis recognize that feminist ethnographers do not operate outside of neoliberalism and, therefore, ethnographers should reflect on their own positions within it. Along with the experiences of contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses, this essay also shows my attempts at negotiating the tensions working within and against the neoliberal system as an ethnographer. It reveals the complications that arise when a researcher is placed into a precarious

position attempts to engage with others who are in similar, yet different, positions. Neoliberalism places the pressure on me to finish quickly, but also to blame myself when I fail. Feminist and queer methods push me to consider the possibility of an imperfect ethnographic project.

To this end, this essay attempts to achieve a few goals. First, it offers a glimpse at what it looks like to be a contingent faculty member performing an ethnography within the constraints of neoliberal academia. Second, it shows how the positionalities of those who teach GE diversity courses interlock to uniquely impact how and if they struggle with these courses. Third, it interrogates a system that utilizes these different positionalities to achieve its diversity goals. Between discussions of my affective experience of the ethnographic process, I offer experiences of contingent faculty from ethnic studies, gender, and queer studies, but most of these experiences are from the department I teach in, Communication Studies. All of them are from marginalized populations. Although a variety of perspectives are represented, I still wish I had more, but time is never on the side of the ethnographer in a neoliberal system. This moves me to my first section: the time crunch of research in neoliberal academia, compounded by contingency.

### **The Unease of Ethnographic Engagement in Neoliberal Academia**

As discussed in Chapter One, Michel Foucault (1979) describes *homo economicus* as someone who accepts the reality of neoliberalism (269). Neoliberalism pushes those within it to maximize their economic potential. They consider how they achieve what is expected of them in as little time as possible. I feel my *homo economicus* nature temporally. When I am wrapped up in the neoliberal system, I feel rushed, especially because my neurodivergency makes me slower than others. In the previous chapter, I focused on how this influences teaching diversity courses. In this chapter, I shift to how neoliberal academia molds my ethnographic methods. Neoliberal



academia pulls me to move faster than I believe is possible. Because of this, I feel the weight of failure in my academic life. When I achieve a goal faster than expected, the weight is lifted. Instead of feeling rushed, I feel a rush. For a brief second, I am present in the moment. That moment stands still. In this section, I want to explore how I manage my unease in the pace of neoliberal academia impacts my ethnographic methods. To better understand this focus, I turn to recent work in queer methodology.

In the final chapter of the *Imagining Queer Methods* anthology, Kadji Amin (2019) wrestles with the way the word ‘queer’ has shifted from the 1990s use of the term directly attached to sexuality and gender to the more current use of the term, one that provides the term with endless mobility. While he does not find this shift to be a major issue, he does believe that the current usage of ‘queer’ sometimes loses attachment to its academic origins. He points out that it is especially interesting that the “mobility, flexibility, adaptability, and portability and the demands for accelerated obsolescence and flexible and mobile labor” have not been explored in more detail (283). He wonders if queer studies must “constantly sell a new product” or if queer studies might resist that neoliberal temptation.

Amin calls the adaptability of ‘queer’ both a disciplinary norm and a front. Queer theory claims to be exhaustive. However, Amin suggests research produced through the lens of queer theory does not produce exhaustive research. He writes, “...only certain forms of nonnormativity, only particular sex acts seem to attach to it” (285). He suggests that rather than focus on the adaptability of the word, queer theorists might focus on which types of nonnormativity attaches themselves to ‘queer’ in order to better understand its changing nature. He believes this might bolster the history of the field while allowing the field to continue to take shape. Amin looks to affect in order to resolve this issue. He proposes attachment genealogy, a

method that allows academics to expose how the “scholarly unease” experienced in a particular situation, or with a specific object, makes that particular thing queer. Rather than simply deeming the experience queer, attachment genealogy necessitates a historical exploration of how it came to be possible to have this particular queer experience. After digging into the history, Amin writes, “The scholar is then freed to perform the final step of attachment genealogy, that of elaborating the alternative scholarly priorities and feeling states the object [or situation] generates in order to both conceptually and affectively reorient queer scholarship” (290). As the final chapter in one of the few texts on queer methods, Amin provides possibility for queer scholarship to adapt, but not at the expense of the deep affective roots that made the field necessary.

Amin’s essay helped clarify why I was called to queer methods for this project. To teach GE diversity courses as a contingent faculty in neoliberal academia is a position that leads to scholarly unease, although in a different way than Amin grappled with in his piece. As Chapter Two shows, although the number of marginalized students and faculty began to increase in the 1980s, neoliberalism simply exploits the diversity (or multiculturalism) of these individuals. Neoliberal academia uses these marginalized individuals as numbers to sell more degrees. They use GE diversity courses as performative efforts of inclusion. Contingent faculty take the brunt of diversity work because they are, more often than their tenured and tenure-track colleagues, expected to teach these courses.

Later in this chapter, I provide some evidence of this scholarly unease. Before doing so, I want to explain how my ethnographic process led to some scholarly unease of its own. In Chapter Three, I spent some time explaining how my contingency in neoliberal academia affects my notion of time. The rush expected in neoliberalism works against the slowness I possess

when I cannot focus because of my mental health struggles or cognitive disabilities. Here, I want to add another layer to this consideration: my position as an ethnographer working on my dissertation. Although feminist ethnography might be useful in resisting neoliberalism, working within the constraints of neoliberal academia makes me rush. Specifically, I need to rush because I need to finish this work because I need to apply (and hopefully find) a job because I cannot afford to take out loans for one more semester.

Although feminist ethnography does not have a single definition or trajectory, Davis and Craven (2016) provide a working definition that tells feminist ethnographers that they must be committed to challenging marginalization and injustice. They also believe feminist ethnographic scholarship should “contribute to movement building and/or be in the service of organizations, people, communities, and issues we study” (11). I describe my work as feminist ethnography because I avow these ideas. However, neoliberal academia does not always give me the option to follow through with my commitments. For example, I had hoped this dissertation would lead to a strong movement of lecturers on the CSUN campus, but convincing an over-worked and undervalued portion of the CSUN population to put in more work that might not be valued takes time. And, the more time I take to convince contingent faculty to commit, the more money I have to spend for my tuition. In the conclusion chapter, I discuss small progress in bringing contingent faculty members together, but I mostly placed this goal on the back burner for this dissertation.

While it is true that whatever work I produce with this dissertation might still contribute to movement building on campus, my failure to produce this while writing this dissertation caused me to consider the way movement building and a commitment to social justice works against the neoliberal expectation to produce publishable research quickly. Davis and Craven consider this in *Feminist Activist Ethnography*. In this anthology, they show what it looks like to

engage in activist work within neoliberal conditions. In their introduction, Davis and Craven (2013) ask, “How do we promote inclusivity and equity through collaborative participation when some participants have more power, time, and/or ability to engage in our research than others?” (17). I asked this question of myself quite a bit, especially when engaging with those who teach on multiple campuses or those who had other jobs or duties to go home to. It felt unfair to even request more time commitments of them.

I negotiated this in a few ways. First, and probably most obviously, I allowed the contingent faculty to tell me what worked best for them. Many of my interviews took place before the interviewee (and myself) had to teach because that was when our schedules synced. One time, I waited outside of an office space for thirty minutes after our scheduled time and had to ask them questions while they ate lunch during their office hours. It was the first week of classes and they were still adjusting to their new schedule. Other interviews had to be done over the phone, as neither of us could meet on campus and both of us lived quite far from each other. While none of these meetings were unorthodox to ethnography, the only plan I had for these interviews was to be flexible because I had to be for myself and for other contingent faculty. While some of this flexibility provided me with a bit of ease surrounding my busy schedule, as someone who deals with anxiety, the flexibility prevented me from creating a routine that lowers my anxiety levels. My unease grew with my anxiety.

My second way of negotiating might be the one others see as unorthodox and, perhaps, more problematic. I simply see it as necessary. After an initial meeting where I discuss a bit about my project, I began to have quick check-ins with those who share an office with me. In the initial meeting, I told each contingent faculty that they could use me as a way to alleviate some of their emotional frustrations, but I also told them they did not always have to spend time giving

me too many details. I left the time given to me up to them. Sometimes, these check-ins were less than five minutes. They knew I wanted some details; I knew they had class soon and needed time to decompress. So, after greeting each other quickly, I would ask how their classes were going. One lecturer in particular would also give me a list, almost as if she was checking things off. While some might see these sorts of exchanges as only superficially valuable, as they only give me a general idea of what went wrong, I think those squeezed by neoliberal academia might identify these exchanges as relatively normal to the culture. We do not always have time to deeply engage, but when we care enough about a subject, we give what we can. I felt guilty about asking them to give a bit more. The guilt combined with my anxiety led to more uneasiness.

This disorganized way of connecting to contingent faculty becomes difficult to explain to those who do not engage in ethnographic work within the multiple constraints that come with being contingent in neoliberal academia. In particular, the Institutional Review Board requires specific explanations of the choices made regarding things like who will be interviewed as well as what the interview questions might look like. In her essay “The Neoliberal Institutional Review Board, or Why Just Fixing the Rules Won’t Help Feminist (Activist) Ethnography,” Elizabeth Chin (2013) discusses how the IRB works against some of the goals of feminist activist ethnographers. Chin recognizes the importance of creating an IRB, as initially it was a way to protect those involved with research from the researchers. However, she sees IRB as moving too far towards the positivist, quantitative approaches, leaving little room for qualitative feminist ethnographers, who often operate outside of these approaches. In a neoliberal climate, it is not a surprise that the IRB would move away from qualitative approaches, as the myth is they do not bring in as much money as quantitative approaches. She writes, “Although the purpose of

the IRB is to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects, the training and assumptions that typically dominate the membership of IRBs does not allow them to engage with most feminist research with a nuanced understanding of the ways in which intimately engaged, dialogic, and power-questioning work is highly ethical and indeed protects the rights and welfare of participants” (140). IRB is another part of the neoliberal system that deems what is research and what is not.

Those unorganized, somewhat unorthodox, methods I described above would not be approved by IRB not because they were unethical, but because I made myself shift as needed to engage with contingent faculty. IRB requires as much of the details as possible, before engaging in research. Chin compares the IRB process to welfare. She writes, “It is this foundational tie with access to federal money that creates between the IRB and researchers a dynamic that is distinctly similar to that between welfare clients and welfare bureaucracies” (143). As someone who remembers going to the grocery store as a child and being able to get certain types of items and not others because the ‘coupons’ we had only covered certain items, I find this comparison to be pertinent and also illustrative of my frustrations with IRB. Although my education was supposed to provide a pathway to a better life, I am still reliant on a group of individuals who have little connection to my reality to show me how to live. So, after multiple attempts, I gave the IRB what they needed in order to approve my work. And, to be honest, I cannot imagine negotiating that process one more time as a contingent faculty member. At this point, I am no longer just uneasy. I am exhausted.

### **The Challenges of Encouraging Contingent Faculty to Make Time in Neoliberal Academia**

Despite this exhaustion, I had to figure out how to move forward on my project. After reaching out to chairs of departments who teach GE diversity courses at CSUN, I began to

realize the impossibility of talking to contingent faculty from multiple departments. I emailed chairs from departments such as linguistics, philosophy, computer science, and kinesiology, but I received no responses. My next step was to go to the CSUN online course schedule and research every single faculty member who taught a GE diversity course. Of those who responded (most did not), one told me they had “bigger fish to fry” compared to my work. Another explained to me that they only teach occasionally at CSUN and had limited time because they do consulting work while also teaching. And some who agreed to participate stopped responding to me as I tried to set up interviews.

Unsurprisingly, time became an issue. In a neoliberal environment, time is always the issue. Part of this issue of time is speculative on my part. Since many of them probably teach at least one other college, time might have prevented this. And, because I am a contingent faculty who is already overworked by my courses and this project, I do not have time to continue to reach out to those who might not have an interest in spending their time helping me. Despite my difficulty making connections, I ended up with five contingent faculty members outside of my department who agreed to participate in my work. Each of them spoke highly of their experience as contingent faculty who teach diversity courses. Their main complaints dealt with the precarity of their position, not their experience in diversity courses.

All of those who agreed to participate outside of my department teach in ethnic and/or gender studies departments and all of them teach courses related to at least one aspect of their identity. For example, those I interviewed from the Gender and Women’s Studies Department identified as women and/or lesbians. In my interactions with them, they talked glowingly about their courses and their students. It seemed the classroom became a space of inspiration for them. In “Privatized Citizenship, Corporate Academies, and Feminist Projects,” Chandra Talpade

Mohanty (2003) describes academia as one of the few places in a neoliberal world that provides opportunity for dialogue and engagement with others. She believes academia is one of the few places where feminists might still be able to work towards their goals of a more just and equitable society. For her, academia is critical to blossoming important conversations that incite positive change. It seems those I spoke with saw this possibility as well.

Gabriel<sup>1</sup>, who recently received his PhD from UCLA, showed this in my interview with him. He currently teaches at UCLA, CSUN, and El Camino College. He has been contingent for 13 years. I met Gabriel outside a coffee shop on campus. Both of us taught in 45 minutes, but this was the only time we could meet. We found a concrete table and sat across from each other. My mind raced as I navigated how to explain my project to him quickly to give him time to discuss his experience. After I asked him how he handled difficult conversations on immigration policies or sexual assault, he told me, “After doing this awhile, I am more prepared to expect the unexpected.” Specifically, he described a time when a student broke down in tears because the class dug into a news story that dealt with physical abuse. Gabriel escorted the student to the counseling center. Later, when he checked in with the student, the student understood this was an issue that must be discussed, but it was difficult for her to be involved in the conversation. Gabriel attempts to create a classroom that oscillates between comfortable and uncomfortable. While he does not want students to feel unsafe, he also does not want to be so careful that he cannot challenge students.

Gabriel hopes his courses provide space for students to find their place in college. He is aware of the number of students who do not make it through college. In particular, he told me Latinx dropout rates are higher than other ethnicities. He does what he can to make students who might be struggling with college have an easier time. For example, he does not assign homework



in the first three weeks of class to help students adjust to the schedule. He also gives them space to have fun, encouraging glitter and other sensory aids in their course presentations. As a first generation Chicana student, he hopes he can inspire others who share some of his identities to continue their education with graduate school. After all, the system cannot be changed if marginalized groups do not gain the power to change it.

In *Gypsy Academics and Mother-Teachers*, Eileen Schell (1998) discusses the split between the institution and the classroom as one between public and private. She explains this separation as “hardly surprising since it corresponds to the institutionalized public/private split of academic work where teaching is viewed as a private or individual activity, while research is regarded as public, professionally sanctioned activity” (66 – 67). Schell describes this split as one where contingent faculty members feel invigorated in the classroom, but invisible and exploited in the institution. Although Schell’s work is based on experience of contingent faculty in writing programs over 20 years ago, this description rings true in today’s neoliberal climate. Neoliberal academia thrives on individuality because it allows the system to continue unchecked. Gabriel and I share the goal of encouraging more first-generation college students to seek out graduate degrees. Specifically, Gabriel aims to encourage more Latinx and Chicana students to see themselves as able to achieve these goals. As more marginalized students receive graduate degrees, changing the system becomes more of a possibility rather than a hope.

Schell’s work explains how one might feel inspired in the classroom, but affectively pulled in another direction when they do not receive the same sort of experience outside of it. This supports the mood shift of each interview when I asked them about administrative aspects of their job. Each person navigated challenges between them and administrators differently. This speaks to the neoliberal climate, one where we are taught to depend on ourselves to figure out

challenges. Mohanty (2003) offers some insight on these challenges as well. She worries about how the neoliberal nature of academia might impact educational policy, especially as it relates to feminist and ethnic studies. In these privatized, neoliberal universities, dialogue and engagement in the classroom become occluded by student satisfaction and profits. Mohanty believes this move towards privatization creates a “truncated professoriate” (178). As education becomes sold in unit cost, the university looks to save money on cost per unit and the professoriate breaks into two groups: (1) tenured and tenure track faculty and (2) contingent faculty. Mohanty believes this truncated system does not automatically grant citizenship to professors. Instead, *wealth* grants an individual citizenship. She writes, “So those who lack economic capacities are noncitizens. This results in a profound recolonization of historically marginalized communities, usually poor women and people of color” (184). Mohanty explains this recolonization process erodes the free choice of students and instructors. Specifically for contingent faculty, the pedagogical choices they make are shaped by precarity. Despite this, the five contingent faculty members I spoke with outside of my department seem to balance the decision-making process between acknowledgement of their precarity and the desire to challenge their students. Contingent faculty also have to make individual choices about how they navigate administrative challenges. This is where I saw their precarity come into play. Each of them wanted more from their union, but they were not sure how else they could convince to union to listen to them.

This struggle with administrative and union communication made its way into all of my interviews. I interviewed Joel<sup>2</sup> in the first floor of the CSUN library a few weeks before the fall semester began. Since school was not in session, the library was relatively quiet, but still bustling enough that we could engage at a normal volume. I tried to mask my anxiety as I introduced myself, and my project, to him. Joel has been teaching at CSUN for five years and he is also a

doctoral student at UCLA. After having some of his courses cut at CSUN, he also began teaching at CSULB in order to keep health insurance for him, his partner, and their child. I knew he had a limited amount of time for this interview, so I went straight to the point.

I began by asking his thoughts on contingency. He explained that he “doesn’t mind” being contingent because the flexibility allows him time to focus on his dissertation. As far as contingency and his teaching style, he does not believe it affects the way he teaches because challenging students is a very important pedagogical technique that he is not willing to sacrifice. His pedagogical technique relies on the trust of his students. “I trust the students enough to want to challenge them,” he explained. He added that the trust of his chair provides him with the benefit of not worrying about losing his position if students find these challenges too difficult. At the same time, he told me he probably would not go to the chair if he had a problem because he does not want to give them more work. In relation to contingency, his main concerns exist with union representation of contingent faculty. As budgets get tighter, he knows contingent faculty members are the first to be impacted. We talked about this for a bit, but I soon recognized our time was up. We both packed up our stacks of papers and books, heading our separate ways down the concrete stairs and into the hot sun.

As I walked away, I started to think about how the visibility of contingent faculty might influence the way the union represents them. In *The Adjunct Underclass*, Herb Childress (2019) describes contingent faculty as ghosts, invisible to the university. He calls them doubly invisible because most faculty members do not know what they teach or what they research and they are typically unable to participate in the university decision-making process. This invisibility becomes especially impactful as the CFA makes decisions about faculty contracts. When they cannot show up to meetings or advocate for themselves in other ways, the CFA moves forward

as if they do not need to treat them differently. This potential impact on both students and the institution makes our position a bit easier to survive. At the same time, if we focus on our individual experiences too much, the system continues to render us invisible.

A relatively new way the system cloaks us in invisibility is through the move to online teaching. An issue with online courses is that our university seems to prioritize student convenience rather than learning. When I interviewed Melissa<sup>3</sup>, a lecturer in Gender and Women's Studies as well as Queer Studies, she spent some time on this frustration. Melissa's major gripe when discussing these courses is the shift from Moodle to Canvas. She called Canvas "the student ass wiper," meaning that Canvas makes life too easy for the students. In some ways, this makes life harder for the instructors. For example, Canvas recently released a mobile app providing students with a way of seeing when their upcoming assignments are due. The issue is faculty members were not trained on the app. Instead, we were trained to present our online class on computers. Many of our prompts and information for future assignments are in modules or pages not easily accessed on the mobile app. Students miss important information when using the mobile app.

While online courses could be a great space to build accessibility for marginalized students and instructors, an understanding of how to bring engagement from the classroom to the online format is necessary for all courses, especially the GE diversity courses aiming to engage difference and hoping for dialogue. Only in my second semester of teaching online, I told her I am still having trouble creating a course where students can engage with each other. I asked her if she also has trouble with this. She did not have an answer for this, recognizing that students who are not inclined to engage in face-to-face courses are even less inclined to engage in online courses. CSUN's Faculty Development Office holds regular online teaching seminars to help

facilitate the design of online classes. Although Melissa and I had both attended multiple trainings, these trainings still left us with questions about what engagement could look like for diversity courses. For Melissa, online courses offered her another way to teach that helped her balance between multiple universities. For me, they allowed me to teach and write my dissertation. They also helped me manage my anxiety and made things a bit easier when I could barely get out of bed on depressed days. In some ways, online courses benefit contingent faculty. However, they are another example of neoliberal academia taking hold. They present the opportunity to do more work. And, since CSUN students take these courses with the expectation that there will be no synchronous classes, they place instructors and students farther away from each other, both geographically and emotionally. It is important to note this interview was conducted pre-COVID 19, where all diversity courses at our campus shifted online. Perhaps more critical ideas will come from this shift. Perhaps neoliberal academia will pounce on online courses. We shall see.

Choosing to teach online courses is one means of survival for contingent faculty in neoliberal academia. In my interactions, I found contingent faculty members like Joel, Gabriel, and Melissa feel mostly positive about their GE diversity experience. They have years of experience where they could develop strategies for survival. From my interactions with these contingent faculty members, it seems they have found the strategies that work for them in these courses. However, they were struggling to survive in other parts of neoliberal academia. Their frustrations targeted other parts of the system. Research presented in Chapter Two supports these experiences, but I want to offer a few brief examples. In her book *Gypsy Academics and Mother-Teachers*, Eileen Schell (1998) presents ways contingent faculty perform gendered labor for English departments with much less compensation compared to other faculty. In the more recent

work *The Adjunct Underclass*, Herb Childress (2019) illustrates ways money that could go to an increase in support for contingent faculty flows to administration instead.

Although my interactions with them did not show how these concerns trickle into the GE diversity classroom, I imagine if we were able to spend more time together, especially when a specific shift happened to workload, salary, or job security, I might have found something a bit different. The challenge of being a contingent faculty member who is studying other contingent faculty members from other departments is that many of us do not have time to do the slow hanging out required to better understand different experiences.

### **The Rush of Getting What I Desire**

Linking up with contingent faculty members outside of my department provided me with important perspective on my department, but it also left me frustrated. I had spent so many years within my department hearing complaints about diversity courses, so, I was invested in hearing more of the same from other departments. This is neoliberalism pressuring me to finish a clean product. Feminist ethnographic methods provide me with ways to resist neoliberalism, but I found I could not always resist. Queer methods supplemented these feminist foundations, encouraging me to connect deeper with the embodiment and performative nature of being an ethnographer. Although I found learning from other contingent faculty helpful, I began to notice a certain type of reaction to some parts of this engagement more than others. When I achieved a goal faster than expected, the weight was lifted. Instead of feeling rushed, I felt a rush. For a brief second, I was present in the moment. In this section, I want to meditate on the affects surrounding the rush I felt when I received the answers I desired.

In her essay attempting to bring queer theory to ethnographic methods, Alison Rooke (2010) describes queer ethnography as a method that skews the way an ethnographer does their

work. Specifically, she believes queer ethnography must rethink the way ethnographers are affective and emotional beings in the field, but detached when writing about their experience. For this process to be queered, the spatiality and temporality of being in and out of the field must be questioned. This is especially true when working in a field that an ethnographic already belongs in. She writes,

“Doing one’s fieldwork close to home (both the location of home and the ontological home of comfort and belonging) problematizes the idea of the field as a space/place physically and temporally bounded. It requires that we think of the field as having fluctuating boundaries which are continually expanding and contracting” (30).

While all of my fieldwork was done on campus, I found myself asking if my field included my bedroom/office as well as local cafes, where I do most of my grading and course prepping. This made me realize that the field looks different depending on other life situations.

Since I was not able to get into some parts of the field (like their homes, favorite coffee shops, and cars), the times when I was in my department’s contingent faculty office became very precious. I had to make the best of my interactions with other contingent faculty members. So, rather than act natural to help others feel comfortable, I would get straight to the point. The space between the field and writing began to collapse, as those involved in my project were reminded that I wanted to know specific information from them. For example, I had one faculty who I would see every Wednesday for about 30 minutes between classes. We were both always in a rush, so our conversations would go something like this (after salutations, most of the time):

**Me:** So, anything new to report? Anything good/bad? In between?

**Her:** Hmmm...nope. Not this week.

**Me:** Well, uneventful is sometimes good for us.

**Her:** Oh, wait, I did have a student walk up to me after class telling me that I not everyone who is undocumented is an immigrant. I mean, I knew that and I was trying to use Mexicans as the stereotype on purpose, but I don't know if he got that.

**Me:** It's hard to see if everyone gets when we use stereotypes as examples that are bad rather than actually stereotyping. The class moves so fast sometimes.

And then our conversation would have to be over because we had to start packing up our stuff to head to class.

The rushed feeling led to some problems with the way I engaged with other contingent faculty. Rooke (2010) calls for queer ethnographers to consider how they perform their role of ethnographer with those they interact with in the field. Rather than simply performing reflexivity, she asks queer ethnographers to recognize the destabilized self that shifts as power arrangements shift. Although I am a contingent faculty member, I am also a researcher who is using these experiences in hopes of gaining a doctorate. The quick engagements with my colleagues show contingent faculty that I understand their time constraints while also revealing my stress to complete my work. On another layer of my destabilized self, although I am marginalized in some ways (gender, ability, queerness), I am not marginalized in the same ways as most of those I interact with through this research process. I had to hold on to the tension between wanting to share stories of difference while also wanting to find commonalities within our experiences. Rather than trying to appear as the rational, calm, objective ethnographer, I am the feminist, queer ethnographer who works within neoliberal academia. My embodiment of the



tensions between feminist, queer ethnography and neoliberal academia shapes my interactions. Even still, I started to wonder if I cared more about my work than if I bothered my colleagues.

Although my time with other contingent faculty always felt rushed, my affect was also impacted by the information shared with me. I did my best to mask these affects, but, since those I interacted with are also in academia, I can imagine many of them guessed at how I was responding to their information. My neoliberal desire to capture juicy moments brought me to jot down parts of our interactions rather than others. The minute a contingent faculty began discussing an issue with a student or a topic in their class, I quickly pulled out my journal to scrawl down some notes. Later, when I looked back through my notes, I felt guilty about my desire to write about their struggles. My work rode on my investment in these struggles.

In “The Trouble with Fieldwork: Queering Methodologies,” Michael Connors Jackman (2010) suggests queer research should be dynamic, unfixated, and fluid. Queer ethnographers should avoid formulaic approaches to the field. The detached nature that some ethnographers are trained to possess in the field is one of these formulaic approaches. In Jackman’s early experience as an ethnographer, he noticed the boundaries between him and the field prevented him from doing the work he had hoped to do. These boundaries held him back. Specifically, he realized that these boundaries prevented him from writing about the personal relationships built while doing fieldwork. Since Jackman’s work studied sexuality, he found it to be particularly important to discuss the various relationships he built in the field. This led to his suggestion that queer ethnographers place feelings like desire and conflict closer to the forefront of their consideration of self-interrogation. As I began to develop relationships with other contingent faculty members, my feelings about my research shifted. I became much more concerned with the exploitation taking place as well as the amount of conflict I was willing to risk. I had a

limited amount of peers working with me and I did not want to say something wrong to limit my work even more. On another note, I became even more invested in shifting the way others saw contingent faculty because I understood how dedicated and undervalued they all were.

Jackman writes, “Yet the problem of representing desire, that of informants and researchers alike, remains troublesome if we continue to conceive of ethnography as something to be done in a faraway field” (126). He offers two solutions, the second of which I want to focus on here. Based on Jasbir Puar’s conception of assemblages, he suggests queer ethnographers radically reorient themselves in relation to their work. This reorientation includes foregrounding how a body shifts as society (or research methods) attempt to normalize it. He writes, “...the question of how research designs account for splintering and tangential growth patterns has far-reaching implications for how researchers carry out their plans and what they finally write up as findings in their entirety” (127). While Jackman’s work focuses on sexuality specifically, this normalization process shapes all ethnographers. Neoliberal academia pushes researchers to look for the experiences that might bring attention to their work in order to help them with upward mobility within the system. Throughout my process, I told myself I was not allowed to desire one answer over another. I told myself my work was supposed to be hard and if I got what I desired too fast, then I must not be doing something correctly. I told myself I was not supposed to be friends with my interviewees. Those tensions were hard to resolve and made me wonder if I would remain stuck in contingency as punishment.

### **The Tentative Nature of Teaching GE Diversity Courses Within a Generalist Program**

In hopes of avoiding failure, I turned closer to home. I teach in the Communication Studies program at CSUN. While the departments such as Gender and Women’s Studies and Chicano/a Studies both hold interdisciplinary goals, the Communication Studies Department is a

bit different because the training in this field focuses on a broad approach to teaching and learning in ways that do not always prepare us for difficult conversations on race, gender, class, ability, and so on. I began to focus on how this particular department grappled with GE diversity courses.

Both feminist and queer theorists call for methodology that explores the interdisciplinary possibility of their fields. In their essay for the *Imagining Queer Methods* anthology, David Rivera and Kevin Nadal (2019) recognize the gap of knowledge of many queer studies practitioners regarding social scientific methods, on one hand, and a different gap of knowledge in social scientists regarding the history and discipline of queer studies. Rivera and Nadal suggest queer studies practitioners and social scientists engage with each other in order to bridge these gaps. One way they suggest doing this is by offering courses that address ‘humanities’ issues through social science departments. The title of some courses offered at CSUN show that some attempts are being done to do this, such as Women in Sports (Kinesiology Department) and Women in Mathematics, Science, and Engineering (Math, Science, and Engineering Department). I had hoped that part of this project could illustrate how these types of courses might provide different challenges than GE diversity courses. Unfortunately, although I reached out to a number of contingent faculty members, I was unable to engage with any of them. Despite this failure to dig into an important part of how contingent faculty members might reinforce and/or resist neoliberal academia’s attempt to exploit diversity courses (and the faculty) in social scientific departments, I did find a way to tease at the issue of interdisciplinary goals.

Unlike some of my previous interviewees who felt prepared to take on difficult conversations regarding subject matter related to their departments, my 15 interviewees in Communication Studies all expressed some difficulty with either the way they present

themselves, the way others see them, or a bit of both. In *Academic Life and Labor in the New University*, Ruth Barcan (2013) provides some insight into this. She finds that courses that take on a broad approach, rather than a more specialist one, impact instructors in that they feel fraudulent because they do not have time to dig deep into the multiple issues brought up in class. Barcan does not approach this idea with an intersectional lens, but the contingent faculty I talked to felt this on a number of levels related to their interlocked oppressions of being in a precarious work position and their ethnic identity.

For example, Jinah<sup>4</sup>, an Asian American woman, talked to me about an exchange in her classroom on the model minority topic. In an attempt to avoid the black/white binary that sometimes becomes the focus when dealing with race and ethnicity, this instructor chose to focus part of the conversation on the ‘model minority’ myth. When doing so, she received push back from a black student. He told her Asian Americans created the model minority themselves. After this exchange, she said he consistently pushed back against her in the next few weeks of the class. Although she did not seem surprised at the push back, when she presented the story to me, she trailed off multiple times, showing to me that the exchange is much more complicated for her than a traditional difficult exchange in the classroom. With this initial exchange, I began to wonder if this exchange was especially pertinent because she was one of those Asian Americans who did not fit into the model minority.

Political events also shape if instructors feel confident discussing particular subjects in broad courses. Katrina<sup>5</sup> shared with me that she found the concept of immigration to be especially difficult because of her husband’s former status as an undocumented citizen. Throughout my ethnographic work, Donald Trump had been capitalizing on fear some had of immigrants to achieve his political ambitions. Not only did he begin his presidential campaign

with a racist statement describing Mexicans as criminals and rapists, but after winning the election he used his power to implement immigration policies that made life even more difficult for immigrants (documented or not). Adding to this, he continuously threatened to implement even more policies that would further punish immigrants.

The list of these policies is long. Pertinent to the experience of Katrina is President Trump's multiple threats to the Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA) policy. This instructor's partner was one of those protected by this policy. After their marriage, her partner's status changed, but she still felt very strongly on the DACA issue as well as other harsh immigration policies. She explained to me she found it difficult to hold in her bias for this politically charged issue. This comment on bias is something I hear regularly from others who teach in Communication Studies, especially those who are new to teaching. I think this is where Barcan's notion of teaching broad courses rather than more specialized ones might hurt contingent faculty in this field the most. In some of the courses in Communication Studies, instructors focus much less on how their subjectivities affect their biases and much more on using theory to better understand how others communicate. In other words, some of the courses (like Intercultural Communication) take a humanities approach and other courses take a social scientific course. This can make contingent faculty who have to teach different courses in different parts of the field feel split.

It is no surprise that Katrina finds the immigration issue to be the most difficult part of teaching Intercultural Communication. Of course, this is not the only part of her uneasiness regarding the class. When she found out she would be teaching this course, she dreaded the first day and the other weeks to come. She told me, "I want to cry already," before having met her students. For the first day, she dressed "extra professional" in order to show her credibility. She

makes consciously different choices than she does for courses such as Public Speaking or Argumentation. In the first few weeks, she must establish credibility quickly before the course shifts to focus on identity and another one of her least favorite topics: white privilege. It seems any time I checked in on Katrina, she worried about the next topic of conversation.

This constant worry speaks to the ways Katrina's intersecting identities impact her relationship to GE diversity courses. As a woman of color who has multiple family members impacted by immigration rulings, a course focused on addressing power and privilege presents multiple opportunities for her to have personal, emotional investments in the topics up for discussion. At the same time, students could read her body as one that has investments in these topics, so she is not able to mask those investments. When she discusses white privilege, she always receives push back, especially from white men. She knows this has something to do with her discussing white privilege when not being white, as if they question whether she has a chip on her shoulder. As a white woman, I occasionally receive push back, and I do have emotional investments in the topics of racism and white privilege, but my students do not read me as if I have emotional investments. I can make self-deprecating jokes about my own white privilege to take the tension off. If Katrina makes jokes during these conversations, her body means her jokes are interpreted in different ways.

When I asked Katrina for feedback on these thoughts, especially in how it relates to her intersecting identities, I got a simple response:

*This is perfect, Kelly! Thank you for sharing it with me.*

I had hoped for some corrections or additions to my interpretations. After receiving no response from others who were involved in this research, I realize brevity is better than no response at all.

Another important layer to understanding how Communication Studies might function a bit differently is the expectations of the students. First, a student might see the perspectives of departments differently. With a Chicano/a Studies course, a student is more likely to expect the instructor to teach from a perspective that favors this marginalized group. A student might expect this a bit less from a broadly labeled Intercultural Communication course. Second, and this is most important for the interdisciplinary issue I want to address, all accounting majors are required to take Intercultural Communication as their GE diversity requirement and, based on my seven years of experience teaching the course, many business majors are encouraged to take this course to satisfy this requirement.

My research does not aim to better understand student expectations, so it might seem a bit off topic to focus on them here. However, in my interviews and personal experience, it was obvious that contingent faculty held their assumed student expectations in mind. So, in the next few paragraphs when I discuss student expectations, I am focused on those expectations as understood by instructors of the course. It should come as no surprise in neoliberal academia that instructors are concerned with student expectations, especially for contingent faculty who depend on student feedback to keep their careers afloat. When discussing neoliberal academia's expectations of faculty, Ruth Barcan (2013) explains, "Academic courses are now a form of product, and are routinely evaluated according to the business logic of 'quality control'" (102). Student evaluations are one way the university checks the product. Barcan describes this type of quality control as different than other forms because it is "much more personal, emotional, and targeted than more neutral, routine, or industrialized forms" (103). It might make sense that

instructors do not want to have difficult conversations, but, again, that was not the case. Rather, they became concerned with how those not involved in the difficult conversations might interpret it.

As suggested previously, immigration is one of those topics that typically results in difficult conversations. The layers in this issue make it difficult to spend 1 – 2 weeks on. An entire course could be built around communication and immigration. Because Intercultural Communication is so broad, instructors in my department typically spend a week digging into it (with references to immigration throughout the semester). Jinah<sup>6</sup> illustrated how frustrating this can be when teaching to a room of students who have vastly different knowledges of this issue. She tells me she wanted to start with how undocumented immigrants are stereotyped as Mexican and then bust open that stereotype. She used a class session to attempt to do this. At the end of the session, a student came up to her and offered her some unsolicited feedback. He explained to her that Mexicans were not the only immigrants who were undocumented. She tried to explain that she understood that, but the conversation caused her to reflect on how the other students interpreted what she had tried to do.

Combined with personal investments in course topics, it is no surprise that some contingent faculty begin to opt out of these courses. I spoke to more than a handful of contingent faculty in the Communication Studies Department who had taught Intercultural Communication in the past, but had asked the department to take them out of this teaching pool. Unlike Katrina or Jinah, these faculty members had a 3-year contract with CSUN, which means they have taught there for more than 6 years. These 3-year contracts provide more job security, both with the contractual requirement of course offerings for three years rather than 1 year, but also because



they have more teaching experience in a variety of courses. So, those who have more security are able to opt out of teaching GE diversity courses if they become too much to handle.

One of the contingent faculty members I spoke with had been teaching at CSUN for 20 years. Lindsey<sup>7</sup> describes herself as a feminist in her courses, including the GE courses on Gendered Communication and Intercultural Communication. In our first interview, she revealed to me that she started requesting to teach courses that are less emotionally draining. She believed those courses take too much “emotional bandwidth” and she would rather use this bandwidth on other parts of her life. She asked the department to take her out of the Intercultural Communication pool and only half of her courses relate to gender. The other half include courses like Advanced Public Speaking or Introduction to Communication Studies, both courses that she can choose when to discuss the difficult issues and when to have an easier day. She described these as “fun baby courses” that are not intensely emotional.

Through email, I asked Lindsey<sup>8</sup> to look at how intersectional parts of her identity might have impacted her decision to teach these less emotionally draining courses. She identified ways the intersection between her gender and her race impacted how she felt about teaching GE diversity courses. She wrote:

*In terms of intersectionality, as a white woman, I have it easy when it comes to Intercultural. But honestly, in this time of [Supreme Court Justice Brett] Kavanaugh, and [violence in] Charlottesville, and #metoo and THAT MAN [Donald Trump], I can't teach about whiteness anymore. I am tapped by continuing the 'dig' into our unearned privilege, but more importantly, I am beleaguered by losing. I am beleaguered by the cultural backlash (the Elizabeth*

*Warren predictive misogyny, the culture wars on twitter and INCELS and Ben Shapiro and Jordan Peterson). I'm tired of being white and critiquing whiteness and not having that be understood largely by white men in my class and not knowing how to penetrate their defensiveness.*

Of the changes that happened after choosing to teach less of the GE diversity courses:

*I am less DRAINED at the end of the day. I have fewer arguments in class. My students don't send me youtube videos 'debunking' my claims about trans identity and the importance of pronouns or kids in cages. I don't have to defend myself and I am not attacked on RMP as a feminazi or bitch because I did.*

Since race and gender are more likely to be seen as markers of privilege than other parts of one's identity, it is no surprise that these two are prominent in the way she understood her experience. Importantly, she also brought up how levels of contingency impact her opportunity to opt out of these challenge courses.

*I am sharply aware as I write this that part of the privilege of checking out is that I am an insider. I know that it's a luxury to be able to say, "It's too hard and I don't want to do it anymore." It's a luxury in terms of my identity (white hetero-ish cis woman) AND my seniority. I have EARNED the luxury through 20 years of service. Younger faculty don't get to opt out – they are forced to do the emotional*

*labor and yet, are typically less equipped to do so. More energy, yes, but not as much real-world experience to support their framework.*

This last point speaks to reasons why some with less security might struggle so much. Technically, contingent faculty have the opportunity to say no to any course offered to us. However, when we say no to our initial offers, that choice impacts the contracts we have in the next year. Adding to this, we may not have as much experience teaching other courses, so if we add courses to our vitae, we are more likely to be offered more courses the following semester at CSUN and/or at other schools. This struggle shows the impact of precarious positioning as contingent faculty without seniority. We take what we can get because we are scared that if we do not, we might not get anything.

I also asked Lindsey if taking less GE diversity courses had any impact on her. Unsurprisingly, she tells me it has “enormously.” She cries much less and she is less drained. She also tells me her marriage is better. Despite this, she still struggles with her contingent position. Of her frustrations with this, she writes, “I do still cry over issues of space and disconnection – so my battles are now meta – within my own department versus within the classroom - and that can’t be changed as easily as “take me out of that pool.”” For now, she has given up on the battle in the classroom and moved her energy to battle for more visibility of contingent faculty in the Communication Studies Department.

### **Conclusion: The Anger Created by Neoliberal Conditions**

I am not satisfied with the final draft of this paper. I left many of my interviews frustrated, telling myself that I did not ask the right questions. As I typed up the experiences of others, I found myself looking through my notes to make sure I included ‘the best’ of their

shared experiences. When I looked through my notes and do not find the story that encapsulates an instructor's experience, I became angry. I directed this anger, frustration, and disappointment to the lecturer who was late, the ones who did not return emails, the way I wrote the questions, or the way I carried myself. Eventually, I realized neoliberal academia was to blame for most of these feelings, specifically, the neoliberal expectation of producing easily digestible work. And for those who do diversity work, whether it be in the classroom or in research, we must turn the messiness of diversity into a finished product. The pressure of teaching diversity in neoliberal academia shapes the way I approach intersectional ethnographic research. Neoliberal academia is an obstacle for intersectional research. And that makes me angry.

This misdirected anger shows the deeply embedded nature of neoliberal academia's diversity training. I have spent most of my adult life molding into a contingent diversity worker. As I looked at my interactions with other contingent faculty through the lens of Patricia Hill Collins's (2019) core constructs of intersectionality, I began to see the formation of a contingent diversity worker. These workers perform diversity through the precarity of neoliberal academia. From my vantage point, they possess a few traits. First, contingent diversity workers are isolated. Collins deems relationality as one of the core constructs of intersectionality. She writes, "The analytic importance of relationality intersectional scholarship demonstrates how various social positions...necessarily acquire meaning and power (or a lack thereof) in relation to other social positions" (46). Many contingent faculty work at multiple campuses and/or are overwhelmed with erratic schedules, which leaves them little time to mingle with others in their position. Those contingent faculty members outside of my department involved with this study knew of other contingent faculty, but mentioned they rarely saw other contingent faculty on campus. In my department, the contingent faculty share an office space separated into cubicles with high

walls. Even if we happen to be in the office at the same time, the walls literally block us from communicating with each other. While isolation might be a trait of all contingent faculty, it is especially important to explore isolation in relation to being a contingent diversity worker because it might impact how they navigate their diversity courses. Although they teach courses within the core curriculum, these faculty are rarely engaged with by administrators and other faculty. If pushed to tackle these difficult courses on their own, they might eventually burn out. Or, they might take out some of the difficult stuff to make it easier on them. My point here is that it is hard to expect an instructor to continue teaching diversity courses in a way that emphasizes power dynamics, inclusion, and dialogue when they are offered little to no support from their university. This is especially true because many of these contingent faculty are already dealing with not fitting the heteronormative, masculine, white mold set by academia.

The second trait of a contingent diversity worker deals with performativity of their work within the power dynamics of neoliberal academia. Collins describes the core construct of power as a process that produces social inequities amongst those within a system. A contingent diversity worker might conceive themselves of having little power within their system. In order to gain power, they use their actions in strategic ways. In the Ethnic and Gender Studies classroom, this performativity includes the embodiment of the groups you discuss in class. It also includes picking readings, films, and subjects that an instructor views as underrepresented or misrepresented. In the Communication Studies classroom, instructors have a more difficult time deciding what this performativity might look like. For some, it is similar to the performative choices made in Ethnic and Gender Studies. However, others worry that students see these classes as more neutral. This leads to some of them choosing to present a diversity course that looks neutral, despite the impossibility of neutrality. These choices reflect the way neoliberal

academia understands the concept of diversity. At the same time, these performative efforts mark how diversity is understood by others who interact with them, including the students.

On another level, to research within neoliberal academia, one must show administrators they are performing in the proper way. I have also seen these performative actions take place by attending, and discussing, numerous diversity workshops. Or, posturing about one's teaching style in faculty meetings. While it is frustrating to jump through hoops, these choices are necessary to survive in a system that does not seem to care about one's survival. The problem arises when more effort is placed on doing the right things to stay in place rather than allowing for these steps to move contingent diversity workers to a more secure position within the system.

The final trait of a contingent diversity worker is exhaustion. This exhaustion shows itself in different ways. Some are simply tired of being treated like lower-tiered faculty who are thankful for the benefits they receive, but who are also knowledgeable about the exploitation taking place. They are tired for having to fight for things like health care, job security, and a living wage. Some, like me, are angry that neoliberal academia locks them into a contingent position. Others are ready to break after having one too many conversations where there are no right answers, but when students demand them. Collins describes social justice as a core construct that speaks to the ethics of intersectional scholarship. This construct pushed me to share the stories of contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses because many of these courses possess social justice goals while being taught by faculty who are abused by neoliberal academia. As academia considers how they want to (mis)use diversity in the future, they might consider how goals of diversity (mis)align with social justice. If social justice is a concern, universities might consider how to support a group that has held down by the weight of its diversity work. Contingent diversity workers cannot tear away from diversity work.

All three of these traits work against the interdependency necessary to shift neoliberal academic conditions. Freeman (2010) describes chrononormativity as the process of privileging a certain orientation toward time. It is a way institutions use time to encourage maximum productivity of individuals within it in order to maintain the existing conditions. By design, the contingent diversity worker does not have the time, space, or energy to change their conditions. They remain stuck in an exploitative system that relies on them to perform necessary diversity work. As I conclude this essay, I wonder how many more essays I will need to write to dissolve the adhesive of contingency. I wonder how many more voices must be shared before academia starts to shed its neoliberal shell.

## Chapter Five: The Emergence of a Pedagogical Community As Care-Work in Precarious Times

I'm about to make the least bold claim of this dissertation: Inspiration is tough. For those who make art, inspiration might come at the oddest times, but when it comes, it compels an artist to capitalize on the feeling. For those who do research in a neoliberal climate, inspiration coincides with waiting to be written into a proposal in order to receive approval (and, better yet, funding) before moving forward. When I proposed my ideas for this dissertation, I told my committee members I wanted a chapter that showed the formation of a coalition or community that allowed faculty members to work together. I was asked to be more specific and, even though I did not get much more specific, my dissertation was approved with some caveats. Now that I am shoulder-deep in my research, I understand how specificity might be beneficial to the approval and funding of my future projects in neoliberal academia. Specifics receive money and the university needs money. The potential of money receives approval.

I write this chapter in an interesting (awful?) time. In early 2020, COVID-19 began wreaking havoc all over the world. Those of us in academia were impacted in a variety of ways, but immediately we were all challenged with placing our courses online in the middle of a semester. Since this is an on-going crisis, most of us are planning for online learning for the fall as well. While it was evident COVID-19 was changing our lives, it was even more clear the pandemic impacted Black and Brown communities more than other racial groups. In late May 2020, the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, as well as the lynching of Ahmed Aubrey, hit the United States as they were beginning to reveal racial disparities in victims of COVID-19. Millions of individuals all over the world took to the streets to protest the brutal killing of these three Black people, as well as many others before them. Those unable to risk their health in the streets began to ask what else they could do. Finally, it seemed the



overwhelming majority of people in the United States were inspired to take up race as an issue that needed to be changed.

After the murder of George Floyd, the chair of my department sent an email telling the faculty that their faculty of color, especially Black faculty, are not okay. She did not ask us to check on them. She did not ask us to help. She demanded we dedicate ourselves to making change for the betterment of the faculty of color. She demanded our care. I had already invested in this notion, but I knew I needed to do more. When I saw a contingent faculty member ask if other contingent faculty would like to join efforts, I contacted her and we brainstormed some ideas. Then, I sent an email to the other contingent faculty members inviting them to join us in (1) contacting politicians, (2) starting a book club, (3) going to protests, and/or (4) cleaning up our communities after protests. Nine people responded, most of which were interested in doing a few of the ideas, but all were interested in the book club.

Initially, I was a bit disappointed in this choice. It seemed too easy. At the same time, I realized none of us lived less than 20 minutes away from each other and some of us have health concerns that prevent us from going to protests or cleaning up. Much like the way I had to be flexible with interviews, I opened up my flexibility to see how we could make this book club one that could shape us as instructors. This chapter shows how allowing shared leadership in this book club carved room for contingent faculty to care for each other as they prepared for a difficult fall semester. Without a physical office space to share joys, frustrations, and breathe, we used these sessions as the space we needed to hold each other accountable to the social justice values of our department.

This chapter relies on the concept known as emergent strategy developed by adrienne maree brown. Brown (2018) defines emergent strategy as one that blossoms out of everyday

interactions with the potential of pollenating other interactions in order to create cultural shifts. In an attempt to zero in on some of these micro interactions, I have chosen to take a slow look at how our group formed into a community of care. I am offering this glimpse of a community that is still in development to emphasize the on-going nature of emergent strategy. I have also chosen this focus because of the time it takes to form community. It took me almost 1 ½ years to feel trusted enough to start this group and, even now, I am working on this trust. In neoliberal academia, where I am forced to produce as much work as possible, I do not always have the time to slow down. In this paper, I take this time in order to answer the following questions: How do those in this group offer care to each other? What are some failures of care on my part? What ethic of care is emerging out of this blossoming community? GE diversity courses are always impacted by what happens outside of the classroom. All contingent faculty I spoke with recognized this and did their best to incorporate this knowledge in their lessons. As one might imagine, it can be hard to keep up with the news if they are overwhelmed with too many courses, too many students, or both.

### **The Offering of Emergent Strategy to Feminist Ethnography**

With my choice to use feminist ethnographic methods, I made a conscious effort to center gender as part of my intersectional analysis. In previous chapters, I recognized the ways contingent faculty members are often asked to do the emotional, feminized work of teaching students outside of their departments. I have also shown how contingent faculty are more likely to be women and instructors of color. While those findings are implicit in this chapter as well, I am moving this chapter towards another tenet of feminist ethnographic methods: the concern of praxis. In this section, I discuss the importance of praxis within feminist ethnographic methods. I

also explain how the interactions that came as a result of praxis allowed new relationships to emerge.

Feminist ethnographers seek to include multiple voices within their work. They do their best to be attentive to how power dynamics shape the environment they have chosen to study as well as the relationships they develop in the field. Perhaps this is how some types of feminist ethnography evolved into feminist activist ethnography. In their book on this method, Christa Craven and Dána-Ain Davis support this notion. They believe that as feminist ethnographers began to reveal different forms of oppression through the voices of the marginalized, they were not satisfied. Instead, these feminist ethnographers began working towards making the structural changes that needed to happen to work towards a more equitable society. Craven and Davis (2013) write, “It is within this context that feminist ethnographers have continued to encourage the production of feminist knowledge as a project inseparable from praxis, placing feminist ethnography firmly within the liberatory context” (14). Feminist ethnography, and all the work that comes with it, is feminist praxis.

Craven and Davis describe feminist activist ethnography as one that has “the potential to pour salt on” the economic and political wounds caused by neoliberalism (17). The authors discuss some specific concerns of feminist activist ethnographers living within a neoliberal context.

“1) making strategic (if sometimes challenging) decisions about whose voices to foreground in our work, 2) engaging in participatory research, especially those of us who began ethnographic projects with pre-existing activist commitments, and 3) offering important critiques of the movements we study while remaining supportive of their overall goals” (15).

By focusing on these concerns, feminist activist ethnographers play a role in shifting what an activist space looks like rather than simply describing the activist space. I have already expressed these concerns in previous chapters, but this chapter shows me grappling with all three concerns.

Craven and Davis give credit to transnational feminists as those who paved the way for other feminist ethnographers to begin tackling neoliberalism. These transnational feminist ethnographic works cover topics such as capitalist control over young women's sexuality in Malaysia (Aihwa Ong), the organization in support of free trade zones in Nicaragua (Jennifer Bickhim Mendez), and women's grassroots organizing in Ecuador (Amy Lind). Craven and Davis's anthology of feminist activist ethnography continue this global focus. For example, Davis (2013) describes the intimate experiences of poor and working-class women as they navigate the possible loss of government assistance within a neoliberal climate. The two women featured in her essay voice their frustration of being squeezed by the neoliberal focus of individualism and hard work with their actual need for money, housing, and other assistance. Although they are happy to participate in her research, Davis believes they are partially motivated by the chance that Davis might have connections that could help them get the services they need. Throughout the essay, Davis struggles between her academic work and social justice morals. She calls for feminist activist ethnographers to be careful about how one uses the voices of others as academic capital if those people are not able to gain anything from their interactions with the ethnographer.

Concerns about exploitation of my colleagues is always in the forefront of my mind, which is why I was so excited to form this group. It is a way for me to give back to those who helped me with this research as well as to others who have cared for me throughout my struggles

with teaching. If I am honest, when compared to transnational work discussed in *Feminist Activist Ethnography*, my work feels small and, initially, I did not feel like I could call this activist work. But I think that feeling is shaped by my neoliberal environment. This environment tells me I need to have a big project, a unique one, one that sets me apart from other academics. Unfortunately, as I have discussed in previous chapters, I simply do not have the time or finances to do something big by neoliberal standards. Instead, I have chosen to focus on the small in hopes of trickling into other small ponds until we come together to form a lake. Although I was partially forced into this ‘choice’ to think small, I also come to this choice after reading adrienne maree brown’s *Emergent Strategy*. This concept focuses on the everyday eruptions that make change possible.

Brown (2018) describes emergent strategies as “ways for humans to practice complexity and grow the future through relatively simple interactions” (2). Although she discusses emergent strategy in connection to building social movements, she also recognizes that it is an adaptable concept that might be used in ways she has not imagined. Many of her thoughts on the concept correlate with feminist activist ethnography. For example, she purposefully juxtaposes ‘emergent’ and ‘strategy’ as a way to encourage the plan to deviate as new possibilities blossom. This demonstrates the call from feminist ethnographers to not only listen to the voices they hope to bring to the forefront, but to allow those voices to guide each project.

I also see her emphasis on the quotidian as a useful way to resist neoliberalism. She believes society contorts people into individuals who believe the only way to create change is through constant growth and violent competition. She invites those who hope for change to consider a different path. She writes, “But emergence shows us that adaptation and evolution depend more upon critical, deep, authentic connections, a thread that can be tugged for support

and resilience” (14). Brown envisions fractals of change throughout the world, all interdependent on each other to make the world more equitable.

Brown is the first to admit her ideas are easy to criticize. She knows some see her as too optimistic in a time that does not deserve it. But, an important element of emergent strategy is each complex individual working within multiple complex systems. And, it seems, she needs to feel emergent strategy exists to continue pushing for a better world. This notion of the complex individual within a bigger system calls to mind how Collins (2019) asks for intersectional scholars to both recognize the complexity of the world as well as the reliance everyone within it has on each other. Before reading *Emergent Strategy*, when I asked myself how to implement intersectionality, my instinct was always to name positionalities and continue to call attention to them throughout my analysis. I was scared of the complexity that Collins and many other intersectional feminists called for because it sounded too hard to show in my research. Brown’s concept reveals the complexity of doing intersectional work, but instead of feeling impossible, it now feels obvious.

Much of brown’s work calls for an unlearning of neoliberal habits. She writes, “We learn to compete with each other in a scarcity-based economy that denies and destroys the abundant world we actually live in” (48). This unlearning is a struggle. She offers elements of emergent strategy to help a practitioner through this process. Elements such as interdependence and the ability to adapt show themselves in previous chapters. In this chapter, I pay particular attention to the iterative and resilient elements. Brown’s attention to the iterative encourages activists to not only allow for interactions to happen, but to allow for these same interactions to happen repeatedly. These multiple interactions may end up being similar, but they will never be the same. The complexity of individuals and the world they live in provides multiple possibilities.

When Brown discusses resiliency, she sees the potential in these multiple possibilities. With this element, she recognizes that people make mistakes. Through multiple interactions, they can learn from those mistakes and transform themselves, which, she believes, helps to transform the world. While my dissertation cannot aim to transform the world, I began it believing I could transform my university. But, I had to think smaller. Brown's work shows me that thinking smaller does not mean giving up.

### **First Meeting**

In order to move closer to the complexity of intersectionality, I chose to keep ideas from *Emergent Strategy* in my mind throughout the formation of the book club. Since I had read the book a few months previously, I had already been contemplating how I could use brown's ideas in my life. In fact, the email I sent regarding ideas on how lecturers could join forces came from her idea of decentralization without me consciously realizing it. While I was proud that some of brown's ideas had already seeped in, she also believes emergent strategy must be intentional. As I planned for the first session, I noticed her book dangling off of my overflowing bookshelf. I grabbed it and soon became lost in the production of what I generically called CSUN COMS Lecturers for Change. In this section, I want to talk about how my meandering through her book carved some room for overworked lecturers to work together on shifting themselves and how they approach some topics in the classroom.

Brown discusses the iterative element of emergent strategy as one that is nonlinear. She believes transformation comes in cycles, convergences, and explosions. It is not a never-ending process where one learns from previous cycles. Brown writes, "If we release the framework of failure, we can realize that we are in iterative cycles, and we can keep asking ourselves – how do I learn from this" (105). To that end, I realized I needed to shape this book club into a group that

could continue their meetings for many months in the future. If transformation was the goal, we would need to make a commitment to each other of this goal. At the same time, I knew all of our availability would change when classes began in the fall. With all of this in mind, I sent a gentle push in my initial email that I hoped this book club could form into a way to help all of us become better instructors throughout the semester.

“I visualize this group being a space where we could continue to educate ourselves on important issues that impact the CSUN community. While we won't always have time to read during the school year, taking time during the summer might give us space to talk about other issues when school is in session. We could help each other navigate difficult conversations, encourage each other to bring up important topics, and provide any other needed support.” (Personal email correspondence, June 4, 2020)

Throughout the rest of the email, I emphasized my cautiously optimistic mood despite all of the turmoil in the world. I expressed to them this book club, as well as so much of the activism going on around us, shaped my optimism.

Since many parts of the world were protesting the police killing of Black and Brown bodies, I took initiative to assign the broad category of race for our first book club. After asking for suggestions, I created a survey where they could choose which book they wanted to start with. Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist*, Safiya Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression*, and Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility* made the list. One part of me considered leaving Robin DiAngelo, the only white author, off the list, but I chose to keep it on because it was recommended by many members. To my dismay, our members chose DiAngelo's book.



Not only had I already read the book, but, more importantly, I did not want a white author to be the first one.

As I prepped my questions for the first meeting, I was so excited to put us all on the spot for selecting a white woman to start us off. But, then I reconsidered. Of critique, brown writes, “Critique, alone, can keep us from having to pick up the responsibility of figuring out solutions. Sometimes I think we need to liberate ourselves from critique, both internal and external, to truly give change a chance” (112). I asked myself: What would it look like if I started off with a critique? How would this allow some to want to continue to learn with me and others to want to quit? Before I had made my decision, one of the other members wrote an email gently stating her disappointment on the selection of a white author. Another member sent an email with a PDF of the book attached, agreeing that we should save our money to help authors of color. I sent an email also agreeing, mentioning that I had planned for us to discuss this in more detail at the beginning of our first meeting. This small back-and-forth served as an icebreaker that allowed everyone to prepare for the critique, which I think allows critique to serve the purpose of making everyone in the group better while not putting anyone on the spot. In her text, brown opens emergent strategy up for shifts in how groups use it. She also advocates for love as the core of all interactions. Although I did not eliminate critique from our first discussion, the careful consideration of how to show critique through care and growth modeled how critiques could be done in the future.

While I fully agree with the above paragraph, throughout the meeting, and as I write this, I also feel a pull in another direction in relation to critique. Our book club consists of white women as the majority along with two women of color. I would be

remiss to acknowledge the irony of being careful about critique while reading a book that critiques many of us in the club. In particular, Robin DiAngelo (2018) writes about how the emotions of white women can usurp control of conversations about race, causing the whole group to avoid moving forward on racial issues. My struggles with weaving in and out of whiteness moves me to avoid confrontation when working with others I do not know well. In the meeting, as I write, and in the future, I cannot avoid the tension between my own idea of critique through a care and growth mindset compared to what that might look like for others in the group. In fact, I think this tension serves as a reminder to be aware of when I am erring on the side of whiteness and to move away from that error.

Of course, this was only the first meeting. We have time to build our relationships with each other. In this meeting, a few members expressed they were in another book club with the same book and they wanted to know if we needed this book club while there are so many others. I shared with them my interest in learning with others who teach the same courses in the same department as me so that we could start working together to breach difficult topics in our classrooms. Because of their concerns, I quickly agreed to focus all of my questions on how we can bring these topics to the classroom. We all revealed our shared goal of becoming better instructors when it comes to race and other social justice issues. At this point, I began to see a connection to my dissertation. I started to realize this as an opportunity to bring the diversity topics used in GE diversity courses to other classrooms. In my ideal world, all courses are diversity courses. This was my chance to see that realized.

## **The Importance of Critical Pedagogy to ~~GE Diversity~~ All Courses**

In previous chapters, I narrowed my focus to contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses because I knew these courses required a different type of emotional labor than most GE courses in fields like math or science. Throughout my process, the use of ‘diversity’ courses always felt a bit off because all courses, including those in math and science, should be infused with some of the themes from these diversity courses. This is not to say these courses should replace GE diversity courses, but they should serve as a reinforcement for some of the perspectives learned in them. Before exploring how our small reading group tried to do this, I want to offer scholarly perspectives on how making other courses serve as reinforcements could move academia away from the exploitation of diversity and closer to engagement of difference that makes diversity so necessary for education. To this end, I begin by reiterating points from Chapter Two related to the exploitation of diversity courses. Then, I shift to a few pedagogical offerings on how academia might move closer to encompassing critical diversity.

In his book *The Reorder of Things*, Roderick Ferguson (2012) shows how academia is a conduit for political and governmental control of knowledge. Although explored in more detail in Chapter One, I want to emphasize some of his thoughts again in the next few paragraphs. Ferguson describes the academy as one of society’s gatekeepers. Since its inception, he writes, “...it has simultaneously determined who gets admitted while establishing the rules for membership and participation” (12). For many years, this meant the academy was overwhelming white, economically comfortable, heteronormative men. However, as affirmative action policies passed, the students and professors slowly began to diversify.

This slow shift offered academia the opportunity for a transformation. In fact, women and students of color had been pushing for transformation since the sixties and seventies. According

to Ferguson, these student movements inspired the proposal of “institutional models that were both disruptive *and* recuperative of existing institutions” (16). It is not surprising that academia went with the recuperative option. The institution was able to appear progressive by implementing some superficial changes, such as the addition of women’s studies and ethnic studies departments, while not shifting the values and norms grounded in white, heteronormative, upper-class economic ideals.

While Ferguson criticizes academia’s failure to transform, he sees hope in interdisciplinarity. Ferguson identifies fields such as women’s and ethnic studies as interdisciplinary that have been institutionalized by academia. He hopes academia might stop exploiting these fields and, instead, incorporating some of their interdisciplinary ethics into the institution. He writes,

“Instead of representing the confirmation of power’s totalizing character, interdisciplinarity connotes a site of contradiction, an instance in which minoritized differences negotiate and maneuver agreements with and estrangements from institutionalization. The extent to which interdisciplinary sites work up a critical suspicion of institutionalization is also the measure by which they alienate the American ethos that surrounds institutionalization” (37).

In other words, if interdisciplinary ideas replace the current norms of treating a women’s studies course as separate from a math course, academia could be transformed to a context where those within it begin to question these sorts of norms outside of academia.

So what might this look like? Chandra Mohanty (2003) believes an attentiveness to difference and power as parts of our lived experience is a good step. In “Race, Multiculturalism, and Pedagogies of Dissent,” she writes, “It [THIS] means that we understand race, class, gender,

nation, sexuality, and colonialism not just in terms of static, embodied categories but in terms of histories and experiences that ties us together – that are fundamentally interwoven into our lives” (191). For Mohanty, this engagement looks less like the benign discussions of diversity prevalent today and more like challenging dialogues that might result in conflict or struggle. It also means recognizing that difference and power are not key concepts learned inside one or two classrooms. Instead, they link each person together, they tie one context to another, and they connect a math course to a women’s and gender studies course.

In order to address this issue of the purification of diversity, Mohanty calls for a change at the institutional, disciplinary, department, and interpersonal levels. While I agree that shifts must be made on all levels, the micro focus of this chapter implores me to focus on how individuals might use their interpersonal relationships to complicate the nature of diversity in academia. She encourages academics to be careful about being complicit in the dilution of diversity by the way they interact with colleagues as well as students. She also calls for a rethinking of “the purpose of liberal education in antiracist, anticapitalist feminist ways” (216). They might do this by linking social movements to pedagogical strategies and/or expecting more of themselves and their colleagues on issues related to equity. And, although she is not explicit in this point, doing these things in *all* courses rather than GE diversity courses is especially important.

Shifting to this type of teaching can be difficult. Bell hooks (1994) observes that many academics were taught to teach in a universal way that reflected one type of experience. Of making a shift to be closer to Mohanty’s idea of diversity (what I will call critical diversity from here on out), bell hooks writes, “...many teachers are disturbed by the political implications of a multicultural education because they fear losing control in a classroom where there is no one

way to approach a subject – only multiple ways and multiple references” (35 – 36). According to hooks, many academics aim for safe classrooms where the professor lectures and the students are quiet unless they raise a hand to ask a question. They also stick with familiar readings, saving the marginal works for the experimental weeks, usually toward the end of the semester. Moving towards a critical diversity might mean less security for the professors, but, hooks also states, this could lead to students who did not feel safe in previous environments to become more comfortable in the classroom. This comfort might lead to more student engagement.

Although hooks is interested in student engagement, she does not believe it needs to come at the expense of professor wellbeing. Rather, hooks’ version of critical pedagogy emphasizes the importance of professors to take care of themselves. She believes a professor cannot empower students without self-care. Of this emphasis, she writes, “...professors who are not concerned with inner wellbeing are the most threatened by the demand on the part of students for liberatory education, for pedagogical processes that will aid them in their own struggle for self-actualization” (17). As professors become more empowered, they might feel more comfortable taking the same risks in the classroom that they ask of their students. Hooks believes the vulnerability that comes with engagement of difference must start with the professor. Of course, as discussed in previous chapters, it might be more difficult for contingent faculty to take necessary risks when their existence is precarious.

### **Caring for Each Other Through Community Building**

I began teaching surrounded by support. In my master’s program, not only were we required to take a semester-long course on teaching strategies in our field, we were also encouraged to create teaching activities for the classroom. With so many creative minds working together, it made sense for all of us to share our teaching ideas. I feel lucky to have found a

similar learning community at CSUN, especially because I have heard not all departments value this type of camaraderie. When I began teaching at CSUN, one of the instructors shared with me a *huge* binder of teaching activities for GE courses. As years went by, the contingent faculty in our department became more fragmented because many of us were getting pushed from office space to office space. Eventually, half of us were moved to an entirely different building. Before the pandemic, some of us had already been pushing for the department to help us build community. As our book club began to meet on a regular basis, I began to visualize what community might look for our department in the future through the lens of radical care. Hobart and Kneese (2020) define radical care as, "...a set of vital but underappreciated strategies for enduring precarious worlds" (2). In this section, I identify a few ways working together became strategies to take care of each other.

#### *#1: Exchange of social justice knowledge for the classroom*

During the inaugural meeting, those who expressed frustration with the choice of *White Fragility* suggested other authors who had already made similar statements to DiAngelo's. The major difference between DiAngelo and the other authors was that the other authors were not white. One member suggested Franz Fanon as a place to start, especially his work on the dependency complex. Another member offered Black feminist perspectives, including Angela Davis and bell hooks, in order to show how intersectional work has already pointed out the problems of whiteness and the fragility that comes with it. Importantly, I heard all of these suggestions through the lens of love because of the way they were discussed. No one shamed others for liking *White Fragility*, in fact they all recognized the value of it. Since everyone in the group was working towards making their courses more social justice oriented, those who

suggested other readings were just emphasizing that the members should work to seek out authors of color whenever possible.

This exchange of knowledge led me to ask if the other members would like me to start a shared document where we could use the books as themes to share resources on. On the cover page, I summarized some of our goals. I also added a few ways to take action now, which included petitions to sign, protests to attend, movements to support, and media to consume. Then, I made a separate page for each book. And my brain began rushing as I created sections for each book to help those who aim to teach it or the subject in their course. In one section, I offered chapters that might work for particular courses. Another section included resources that could support some of the text, including interviews or speeches by the author. Finally, I ended each page with a section calling for resources that might be even better than the original or that might add an important point to the argument. I encouraged each group member to add their own ideas to the existing ones.

In a conversation between bell hooks and Ron Scapp (1994), the two of them discuss the nature of engaged pedagogy. While they describe habit as a necessary part of engaged pedagogy, they also talk about the possibilities opened in each unique classroom. For example, Scapp calls the beginning of the semester an important moment where one can spark the interest of the students. As we gathered potential supplemental materials for our courses, I was excited to share with those outside of the reading group because I knew these materials could shape other courses to be more focused on equity and social justice. I had never had the time to build up so many materials and I imagined others struggled with finding this time as well. Our position as contingent faculty made it difficult to reflect our changing world in our syllabi. This did not mean we did not discuss current issues in our courses. It just meant that some of us were relying



on old reading materials to help us tackle new issues. And, for those who used their winter, spring, and summer breaks to keep up, they were exhausted. In his conversation with bell hooks, Scapp says, “Ultimately, the institution will exhaust us simply because there is no sustained institutional support for liberatory pedagogical practices” (160). Neoliberal academia is exhausting. By combining our resources, we avoided some of that exhaustion while assisting each other in become more engaged instructors.

## *#2: Support during the COVID-19 Pandemic education shift*

Although the goal of this book club was to make us more sensitive to race and other social justice issues in the classroom, it quickly became obvious that many of us needed support in other ways. Our first meeting ended with a twenty-minute discussion on strategies to teach online. One of the members had taken a few years off of teaching and she wanted to know what to expect with the online environment during the pandemic. A few days later, she emailed me asking to chat for more advice. She was particularly concerned about bringing her GE diversity course online. Since she had taken a few years off from teaching, she felt that not only was she entering into a different political environment, one that was volatile and unpredictable, but she was doing so in an environment that was not conducive to teasing out the conflict that might come up. We discussed our different pedagogical philosophies and discovered that we had some major differences, but I was able to share with her my experiences teaching the same course online. I gave her permission to explore my previous online courses. And I encouraged her to find a strategy that worked for her, without adding more work compared to face-to-face semesters.

A few days after our second meeting, I got an urgent text from one of the other members. She needed to talk to someone about her fall course offerings. The pandemic impacted course

enrollments, which caused some contingent faculty to not be offered the same amount of courses for the fall semester. She was one of the many who was panicked about this, especially because she would lose health insurance for her entire family without one more course. Throughout our conversation, she expressed many grievances about her years in contingency, but she also told me about her joy of teaching. I listened and tried to offer her advice when she asked for it. I reassured her that the chair does her best to help us. At the same time, we both knew the pandemic was impacting the university financially. I encouraged her to talk to our union. She knew she should but she also mentioned not wanting to shake things up if she did not need to. She also was not sure if she could keep her job if she lost her health insurance.

In her recent work on radical care, McGee (2020) explores how some contingent faculty hang on to their positions because of their love for their work. However, she finds that eventually these contingent faculty become overwhelmed with other types of work that might prevent them from continuing in their position. She writes, "...the meaningfulness of any particular employment can evaporate suddenly in the face of recognition of inexcusable injustice and inequality (the untenable working conditions of contingent labor) or with the emergence of new care responsibilities" (56). As long as there is contingency, then pandemics and other major economic events will push faculty like us to the brink of no longer being able to accept the conditions we are in. It is especially difficult when one teaches a diversity course focused on injustice and inequality when one is part of a group that could lose their position in the following semesters. The position of a contingent faculty became even more precarious in these conditions, which places even more pressure on them to excel in a seemingly impossible environment.

### *#3: Creation of a virtual office space*

After this conversation, I began mentioning the union in some of our emails and meetings. The intersections between our efforts for our students and our efforts for ourselves began to reveal themselves. I also started to see how my neoliberal body resisted asking for help. I kept offering myself to talk or to make another reading list or to lead discussions, but I very rarely asked for help and even when I did it was not an explicit ask. I took some time to reflect. I did not know what I needed, so how could I ask for help? Eventually, it occurred to me that I was so interested in creating this book club community because I missed the campus community I had built with some of my colleagues. I missed accidentally bumping into them in the hallway or spending some (sometimes all) of my office hours talking to them about our frustrations, joys, and how many more weeks we had left until the end of the semester. I wanted our summer book club to become a way to foster relationships that we could maintain virtually in the future. Although I had suggested this in the first email, I did not realize that I needed it. In the next meeting, I began planting seeds to build a network for the fall.

For me, this is where our community became truly radical. I never had a problem caring for others. In fact, this care brought me to teaching the particular courses I teach. When it comes to care for myself, I felt this as something that should be done in secret. Perhaps part of that comes from my struggle with white identity. I do not want to be seen taking care of myself when I know others struggle more than me. I do not want to be a white woman usurping Audre Lorde's work on self-care in order to make myself feel better. However, to care about others means to care about themselves. Hobart and Kneese write,

“Theorized as an affective connective tissue between inner self and an outer world, care constitutes a feeling with, rather than a feeling for, others. When

mobilized, it offers a visceral, material, and emotional heft to acts of preservation that span a breadth of localities: selves, communities, and social worlds” (2).

Creating this virtual community allows me to continue to work on my mental health as it relates to my work environment. It provides me with the space to talk through some of the difficult discussions from my precarious positions. I hope it does the same for my colleagues.

### **Future Care Work in Neoliberal Academia**

Our book club provided opportunities for both individual and community care. When bell hooks (1994) discussed the well-being of professors, she focused on the individual level, but I also think she would agree that wellbeing must be considered at the communal level as well. A neoliberal world might disguise its push to be the entrepreneur of oneself as a push for self-care. If neoliberal academia is to shift, we must care for each other as well as ourselves. Unfortunately, the current institution does not give us the tools to do this. This book club provides those of us within it the opportunity to create new paths of care. Since this group is still under construction, I want to spend this final section on speculation of what might become of our work.

My first speculation is that these type of groups might make care work more visible and, more importantly, more respected. In “A Modest Proposal for a Fair Trade Emotional Labor Economy,” Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) argues visibility is not enough for care work. She believes disabled, queer, femme, working class, poor, and/or BIPOC have been offering endless free care work, sometimes at the expense of themselves. She recognizes that some within these groups might want to do care work, and society truly needs them to do this. But, she writes, “What I think is a problem is when the labor both becomes the *only* way femmes are rewarded in

community and isn't seen as a choice but as what you're just supposed to do (because you're femme, right?)" (139). When I began writing this dissertation, I was interested in learning more about how teaching GE diversity courses might be a different type of emotional labor than the type that comes with teaching other types of courses. This chapter brings me to an odd place where I am performing *more* unpaid emotional labor through the care work for my colleagues.

Although it feels odd to add more emotional labor rather than less, Piepzna-Samarasinha mentions that as care work becomes more respected, it might also become more integrated into our society in a few important ways. First, as it becomes respected as labor rather than simply care, it might be something those who are not femme begin to feel more comfortable doing. Piepzna-Samarasinha explains women are oftentimes expected to want to do the care work, but men do not escape this work. Men also do care work in the vein of being expected to lift heavy things for others or being able to be handy with tools. As it becomes more respected, individuals can start to decide when they can say yes or no to the unpaid labor involved in this work. Second, with recognition of this type of work might bring with it more attempts to place value on this type of work. Value might look like placing monetary numbers on the work. In *State of Insecurity*, Isabell Lorey (2015) discusses how affect work, such as the care labor described above, is typically hard to measure monetarily because this type of work has regularly been pushed to the private sphere, making it seem as if it does not take place in the workplace. She hopes for a time when care for others becomes centered in the neoliberal conversation, interrupting the neoliberal norm of individual focus.

Of course, as care work moves closer to the center of neoliberal academia, it might also become exploited. I am especially worried that those within a neoliberal climate might take care work as another way to become an entrepreneur of the self, which, in some ways, already happens. For example, many tenured and tenure-track faculty serve on committees that offer care for certain parts of their university. Marginalized faculty are especially burdened by these responsibilities (Ahmed, 2012). While I am not here to offer answers to tenured and tenure-track faculty, I recognize how often contingent faculty are looked over because they are rarely part of these committees. These committees are important, but if a large chunk of the teaching population is not part of them, either because they cannot be or because they are not financially compensated so do not want to be, the potential care offered by the committees can only go so far. I hope for the type of care work where all levels of faculty exchange types of care depending on their position and expertise.

My second speculation is that groups similar to our book club might start popping up in different areas of our university, helping to ignite a logic of care within it. Lorey speaks about a logic of care as one that interrupts neoliberal norms, creating space to share ideas about the future. In a space where care becomes centered, Lorey believes those within it can begin to see interrelatedness despite their differences instead of divisiveness because of them. Individuals shift from thinking only about themselves and those similar to them to thinking about everyone else. Lorey describes this potential caring community as the monster precariat that come together to demand a more equitable, socially just society.

In “Capitalism’s Care Problem,” Micki McGee (2020) offers some advice on what the relationships within this monster precariat might look like. She believes the exploitation of contingent faculty could serve as fuel to the labor movement flame needed in academia. She sees the current state of affairs as a “personal care catastrophe” that has opened space for political mobilization. But, this mobilization must not simply be one against the institution. It has to also be one that cares for those within it. She writes, “It will demand both improvisation and ingenuity and at the same time it promises to be what full engaged, unalienated labor can be: exuberant, demanding, exhilarating, and, often, simply fun” (55). Without these components, she believes we will fail at the social solidarity necessary for institutional change.

Piepzna-Samarasinha writes, “No institutions exist to help us survive – we survive because of each other” (137). Despite all of us working within a neoliberal institution, we can take little steps to help each other. And these little steps create pathways to change within our neoliberal world.

## Conclusion

Throughout the two-year process of writing this dissertation, my body felt the weight of every second. As I examined the history of neoliberal academia and the exploitation of diversity, my body sunk at every time a win turned into another way for academia to exploit the marginalized. While I grappled with my anxiety teaching diversity courses, my body continued to fragment into smaller shards of glass waiting to be picked away to expose the true academic hidden behind my white, cisgender, queer, working class, neurodivergent identity. When I looked to other contingent faculty members to better understand challenges in these courses, I began to see my body differently. My body became connected to others who might not share my affective experiences, but who did share some of my struggles with teaching diversity courses while negotiating contingency. Through these connections, I began working with other contingent faculty towards more interdependent relationships with colleagues in our department. We ignited small resistances against neoliberal academia. It is up to us to turn this into flames.

When I asked my initial research questions, I wanted to know how others navigate GE diversity courses despite their contingency. I was especially interested in how positionality might impact navigating these courses. I also hoped to find ways to care for each other while we teach these difficult courses. In this conclusion, I summarize some of the ways I answered these questions. However, as I write this conclusion, I realize many of these questions relate to my own feelings of out-of-placeness in academia. As a first-generation college student, I had no one to help me figure out how to be a college student, which led to me dropping out for five years before finishing. My first years of graduate school coincided with finally grappling with undiagnosed mental health issues and invisible disabilities. Although I had an excellent support



system in my cohort, many of us flocked together because we didn't feel like we belonged in academia.

I turned to contingency after my master's program because I did not know where else to go. My first few years of this experience pushed me to further my education at Claremont Graduate University (CGU). I always felt I did not know enough to lead my courses and I thought a doctorate would help. Many of my colleagues with doctorates worked as GTAs in their program. CGU does not provide this opportunity, so I had to maintain my contingent position. Keeping this position also allowed me to shift to a more secure contract within the CSU system. Although I felt lucky to be able to work in some capacity, I did not make nearly enough money to pay my tuition. To save money, I rushed through my course work, but I will still graduate with over \$50,000 in debt.

Since this dissertation focuses on the crux between contingency and GE diversity courses, I have been hesitant to discuss my position as a doctoral student. Most contingent faculty I talked with were not doctoral students, so I made a conscious choice to steer clear of this focus. As I conclude this dissertation and I push for multiple shifts in neoliberal academia, I want to briefly mention how my specific experience as a working-class student facing a massive amount of debt upon graduation affects me. If I think about it, the amount of debt I have, which is more than the cost of my mother's home, paralyzes me. I do my best not to think of it. Once again, I have been locked in by neoliberalism. When I graduate, I will have to think about how I will pay off this debt. Ideally, I would find a tenure-track job that pays much more than my current position. Realistically, I will stay in contingency and I will become a 'freeway flyer,' a contingent faculty member who travels from campus-to-campus. Based on conversations with my colleagues, only then will I be able to make a livable wage. The thought of this is

disheartening because I will no longer have time for research and writing. Perhaps, this is why I moved away from discussing this much throughout this dissertation. Many academics are familiar with the plight of contingent faculty, yet familiarity has not led to care or, more importantly, change.

With this work, I hope I have shown how this plight is not only detrimental to contingent faculty, but also to students and universities who value equity and diversity. In my current position, as a more veteran contingent faculty member, I know the function of my university depends on me, and others in my position, but I also never feel like I am wanted. This is a difficult place to be in when you are tasked with teaching GE diversity courses in particular because it is hard to teach about power relationships and social justice issues when you find yourself in the middle of a very important one. It is hard to teach others to care when you are not cared for. And, of course, as a white, cisgender woman, I can take more risks than contingent faculty of color, or those who are trans, or those who have a shorter contract than me. So, yes, I will offer answers to my research questions because that is what good academics do, but I have a question for neoliberal academia first: What does it say about the university goals for diversity if they are having the most precarious faculty teach these courses?

### **Summary of Chapters**

I return to this question later but let me shift to summarizing some of the important points in the previous chapters. In Chapter One, I provided theoretical grounding for the rest of my research. I began with the exploration of Michel Foucault's (1979) conceptualization of homo economicus. He describes homo economicus in the framework of neoliberalism as the entrepreneur of the self, referring to the ways people are encouraged to make the most of themselves economically as possible. He clarifies this entrepreneurship as, "being for himself his

own capital, being of himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings” (226). This type of homo economicus finds it difficult to engage in important topics, such as politics, if there is not an economic gain from them. I use his homo economicus to shift to precarity, especially of those who are not able to (or do not want to) fit this self-entrepreneurship role. When one finds oneself in a precarious position, their neoliberal instinct to consider oneself as the problem blocks them from pushing society to support them better. Isabell Lorey (2014) explores this precarity by highlighting how those in power use precarity to create divisions within society. She also sees the possibilities of a monster precariat that might work together through shared precarity to shift the logic of society towards a logic of care. GE diversity courses are a place where precarity and power dynamics are not simply considered but are at the forefront of discussions. They have the opportunity to carve space for precarious individuals to share their stories, care for, and learn from others in different, but still precarious, positions.

Unfortunately, contingent faculty are in their own precarious position within higher education. I closed Chapter One linking Foucault’s and Lorey’s ideas to Patricia Hill Collins’s core constructs of intersectionality to help illustrate how positionalities affect how that precarious position is felt. In *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, Collins (2019) suggests the much-praised concept of intersectionality is in a position where critical scholars can choose how it will operate in the future. She believes it has the potential to be transformative, but she also recognizes that some might exploit the concept. She provides six core constructs that might help other critical scholars shape the evolution of intersectionality: relationality, power, a rethinking of social inequality, social context, complexity, and social justice. Each of these constructs ground my work, but the social justice one is the most necessary to understand as one hopes to avoid the exploitation of the concept. Collins writes, “Uncoupling intersectionality from

its commitment to social justice might garner academic legitimation for intersectionality, but it might also undermine the integrity of intersectionality's *critical inquiry*" (275, italics author's own). I chose to ground my work in intersectionality because of this coupling. My work, including this dissertation, my pedagogical style, and my relationships, all rely on this construct of intersectionality. I cannot describe myself as intersectional without commitment to social justice.

This commitment led me to Chapter Two's topic: higher education and the exploitation of marginalized groups within it. Because the pace of neoliberal academia is fast, it can be difficult to slow down and grapple with how it arrived at its current state. Chapter Two gave me the chance to spend some much-needed time on this grappling. Most researchers agree the shift towards neoliberal academia began in the late 1970s or early 1980s (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004; Newfield, 2008; Chatterjee, 2014 and Maira; and Heller, 2016). This shift is marked in a few ways. First, although more students of all income brackets received the opportunity to attend college, tuition started to increase, a trend that continues today, more students also began taking out loans to pay for college, an action that disproportionately impacts working class students and students of color. Second, universities began to seek other types of funding, specifically through government research grants and private interest money. To that end, departments that could quantify their research, including those in the STEM fields, grew while humanities departments started to face difficulties. Third, public universities increasingly felt the pressure to compete in a hyper-capitalist environment, making them more concerned with market competition. Universities began selling themselves based on offerings such as location, amenities, and diversity. Fourth, academia shifted from primarily tenured and tenure track faculty to the

utilization of contingent faculty. In 2020, contingent faculty make up around 70% of faculty in higher education.

While the investigation of all four of these developments is necessary if we want to transform the neoliberal university, my dissertation stands at the crux between diversity branding and the exploitation of contingent faculty. After I provided a historical overview of the development of neoliberal academia, Chapter Two shifted to focus on how universities capitalized on the increase in marginalized students by using them in their brand, but then laying much of this diversity work on contingent faculty. In *The Reorder of Things*, Rodrick Ferguson (2012) exhibits the way academia folded marginalized voices into it, but only within the existing academic framework. For example, academia might make room for gender and ethnic studies programs, but only in ways that do not disrupt the neoliberal system. Not only does this process set the standards of inclusivity, but it also creates the desire within subjects to maintain the current system. Ferguson calls this process a will to institutionality. After the institution of more gender and ethnic studies programs, advocates for these programs may be disappointed by the limited funding they receive compared to STEM fields. However, Ferguson believes, these advocates might fear losing position in academia, causing them to only speak out in ways that will not upset administrators. So, not only does academia limit growth opportunities for these programs, they also limit how advocates voice their concerns about them.

This administrative strong hold on how academia folds marginalized voices into their culture allows them to deem the university diverse on their own terms. In the essay “Race, Multiculturalism, and Pedagogies of Dissent,” Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) observes universities tend to use diversity as a monolithic beast that blends static categories of marginalized groups into a melting pot. Mohanty sees this as problematic because she views

identity not as static categories, but as fluid, interwoven ones that tie everyone together despite their differences. She believes universities must begin to acknowledge and grapple with these complicated ties. Instead, she sees them engage in the “race industry” capitalizing on singular narratives to sell a tidy diverse message (196). Mohanty hopes more faculty members will engage in what she calls pedagogies of dissent, or teaching methods that engage with dissent throughout academia. This engagement provides a pathway to understanding the layers to their dissension within the system, their interpersonal relationships, and their selves.

Concurrently, it might also be necessary to understand how those operating within the neoliberal system might have particular challenges as they hope to move towards pedagogies of dissent. When considering the impact of neoliberalism on higher education, Mohanty observes the professoriate moving towards a “truncated professoriate” (178). This truncated professoriate is the result of universities attempting to save money by hiring contingent faculty who are seen as lesser citizens within academia. Mohanty believes this system limits the way contingent faculty speak freely within it because their precarious position does not provide them the same rights as tenured and tenure-track faculty. Mohanty also believes this lesser citizen group tends to be poor women, people of color, or of at least one other marginalized group (184). If one understands the possibility that GE diversity courses are taught mostly by contingent faculty because of sheer necessity, and contingent faculty seem to be the most diverse group of faculty, one might start to want to untangle these knots. This crux between contingency and diversity is what explored in Chapters Three, Four, and Five.

Before offering a summary of these chapters, I want to remind readers a bit of my particular context. Towards the end of Chapter Two, I moved from the broad focus of academia in the United States to zero in on how neoliberal academia and the exploitation of diversity

showed themselves in the California higher education system. With the passage of the Master Plan in 1960, California hoped to increase accessibility to college. The Master Plan created a tertiary university system: the University of California (UC), California State University (CSU), and the California Community Colleges (CCCs). According to Neil J. Smelser's analysis of the first twenty years of implementation of The Master Plan, it did not go as well as planned because of two competing goals: excellence and accessibility. Specifically, the UC system faced pressure to provide excellence in education compared to the East Coast, Ivy League schools. At the same time, The Master Plan's goal of accessibility meant that a diverse group of students would be admitted, including some who might not be prepared for the university. Soon, this competition within the system impacted funding of each type of college. The UCs received the most funding, the CSUs received less, and the CCCs received the leftovers. Excellence won out, but only at the UCs.

While the excellence of the UC system won, many of those students ushered in through the goal of higher accessibility lost. As Rodrick Ferguson explains in *The Reorder of Things*, academia shows excellence through quantitative efforts such as the checking of boxes on a list of goals. These new students, many from working class families and/or families of color and/or first-generation families, became boxes to be checked off to help the university explain how many identity groups attended every year. They became the students who take diversity courses in order to graduate. They became the students who rarely see themselves reflected in the faculty who teach them.

California State University, Northridge (CSUN) serves as one example to better understand the successes and the failures of The Master Plan. In its 1958 inception, CSUN served what former CSUN professor John Broesamle describes as non-traditional students

because they were older than the average university student. In order to help with its goal to become more racially diverse, CSUN began an Equal Opportunity Program (EOP) that relied heavily on the Black Student Union (BSU) and the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) to know how to guide students of color. On top of this heavy burden, the BSU also dealt with racial tensions, including a 1968 physical altercation between a football coach and a Black student. This tension bubbled up, moving the BSU, the UMAS, and other campus groups to push for changes. These changes included a demand for more students and professors of color as well as the instatement of Afro-American Studies program (now Africana Studies) and a Mexican American Studies program (now Chicana and Chicano Studies). For the next thirty years, college students would continue to push CSUN to do better and CSUN would make small changes to offer them slight satisfaction.

In the early 1980s, CSUN administrators approved two diversity courses. The requirement of two rather than one set the university apart from most other CSUs. More recently, the campus was forced to renegotiate these requirements. In 2018, CSU Chancellor Timothy P. White issued a system-wide mandate requiring the universities to be in sync with only one GE diversity course rather than two. As these courses help fund departments such as Africana Studies and Chicana and Chicano Studies, many students and faculty members were not happy. Through the 2018-2019 school year, they held multiple protests hoping for an exclusion for the campus. Chancellor White, citing the need to make the transfer process smoother, did not grant an exclusion. CSUN administrators reorganized their other GE requirements to lessen the impact on some departments, but only time will show how the university is impacted. The changes began in the Fall of 2019.



While it is quite possible that some departments might be impacted by this shift, I am also concerned about how contingent faculty might be affected. At CSUN, contingent faculty are around 65% of the teaching faculty, a little less than the 70% national average (Childress, 2019). During these changes, I remember feeling quite scared of how my job might be impacted. Throughout my research, perhaps unsurprisingly, I found the type of union contract each contingent faculty possessed shaped how they felt about these changes. As I wrote this dissertation, I transitioned from being on a 1-year contract to a 3-year contract and I felt my body relax immensely when I received the new contract. Since these changes were in flux throughout my research, I chose to focus most of my energy on precarity of our position overall, rather than simply precarity over this particular issue. I chose this route because so many of us were unsure of how we would be affected and that led me to focusing on broader concerns.

Chapter Three began this exploration with a focus on my experience with contingency while teaching GE diversity courses. I reflected on how my negotiations with whiteness, neurodivergency, and my working-class identity compounded on each other to impact how I conduct myself inside the classroom. Important to this consideration is the way neurodivergency and other forms of visible and invisible disabilities are overlooked in many diversity considerations. When I attempt to engage with students over issues where I will not be an expert, my neurodivergency collides against my white identity. This collision becomes especially difficult within the whiteness of academia, a place that tells me I should lean towards the perfectionism of whiteness rather than the imperfection of my neurodivergency. My working-class identity compounds my feelings of out-of-placeness, making it difficult for me to feel confident about anything in the classroom. The precarity of my contingent position only amplifies my anxiety around issues that will never be black and white. In every GE diversity

course I teach, I feel the tension between taking care of my mental health and challenging myself, and my students, to engage with, and care about, difficult issues. At times, it feels impossible. Every time it is exhausting.

It is no surprise that my exhaustion pushes me to desire a less precarious position. Chapter Four showed me wrestling with the work required to move up in academia while also recognizing that the imperfections within my work might prevent me from relieving some of my precarity. Throughout my research, I felt the pressure to find the ‘right’ experiences to satisfy academic readers, but, realistically, I needed to take years to build relationships with those I interviewed. The real challenge of performing an ethnographic project to better understand contingency and its relationship to teaching GE diversity courses is that many of my interviewees either taught at multiple universities or had other obligations that helped them make ends meet. While it was hard for me to make time for interviews, it was harder for others who had even more responsibilities to make time for my research. In fact, neoliberal academia does not allow for researchers who are also contingent faculty to take time to engage in any type of research. It is no wonder why this is such an under-researched group. I turned to queer ethnographic research methods to supplement my feminist methods to illustrate how some of my failures were still worthy of consideration. The creative ways I negotiated with other contingent faculty was an important finding that helps us better understand how to continue research on the care of these groups.

Although I found neoliberal academia prevented me from building the relationships needed to deeply understand the negotiations of contingent faculty, my interviews provided brief snapshots of experiences with teaching GE diversity courses through precarity. I noticed a few things that should be studied further. First, my interactions moved me to focus on my

department, Communication Studies, rather than departments that might be seen more traditionally as departments that focus on diversity. I made this shift because I did not see the same types of struggles with teaching diversity courses as I had within my department. I also made this shift out of necessity, as I quickly realized I would not be able to connect with those outside of my department on a regular basis. Second, within my department, all of those I spoke with reported anxiety about particular issues in the classroom, especially those issues that lined up with parts of their identity. This anxiety appears to intensify burnout, which might lead to those who have better teaching contracts opting out of diversity courses for less emotionally-charged ones. This places the burden on teaching these courses on the less experience teachers.

When I began research for this dissertation, I knew I wanted to find a way to increase affective bonds between contingent faculty and other members of the university. I had my eye set on a coalition with tenured and tenure-track faculty that might work towards a care-centered approach to faculty. However, my interactions with contingent faculty pushed me in another direction. I realized many contingent faculty needed community within our group before we could imagine what community might look like outside of it. Through the formation of a book club, I began to see how small interactions, from email chains to bi-monthly Zoom meetings, might bring down the individualist walls of neoliberalism. Adrienne maree brown's *Emergent Strategy* (2018) offered guidance in the evolution of these relationships as well as the conceptualization of Chapter Five. Emergent strategy allows for possibilities to emerge through intentional everyday interactions. It also values small interactions as those that can trickle into other interactions and then into other ones, providing the potential for big change.

Although the book club did not start out as part of this dissertation, I chose to write about it in Chapter Five to highlight attempts at feminist activist ethnography. Christa Craven and

Dána-Ain Davis (2013) state one major difference between feminist activist ethnography and feminist ethnography is activism includes attempts to work towards systemic change. I saw our relationships as one way to do this, especially as we faced the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on education. Through our exchanges, I found some who did not teach GE diversity courses hoped to teach similar topics to help make our courses connected. We built a Google document that highlights important topics and provides multiple resources for each one.

Unsurprisingly, I was smacked with the challenges of building relationships within neoliberalism as well. Although the first meeting had six in attendance, less and less people showed up, mostly because they had other obligations. Some were moving or traveling to be with family. One was dealing with after-effects of COVID-19. Others were working over the summer, limiting their time. Despite some of these circumstances, I am hopeful this group will continue to grow and care for each other, especially in engaging difficult issues in the classroom.

### **Neoliberal Academia and the (Lack of) Care of Its Precarious**

The findings of this dissertation provide a close examination of the impact of neoliberal academia on the shaping of diversity in a few ways. First, the experiences represented in this dissertation contribute to growing scholarship on contingency and the possibility of upward mobility in academia. Some in academia are familiar with the plights of contingent faculty through extreme examples, such as homelessness and death because of lack of health care. This dissertation shows a less extreme version of precarity where, as long as one teaches more than three units, one receives health care and other benefits similar to tenured and tenure-track faculty. Comparatively, we are better off than many other contingent faculty. However, our positions do not provide chance for growth because (1) we need to teach at multiple universities to make ends meet and (2) we do not have the time to commit to research or other growth

opportunities because we are moving from school to school. Not only does this impact our individual growth, but it also prevents us from building relationships with colleagues. Chapter Five shows how efforts of growth collapses as individuals tend to their multiple responsibilities. Contingency is the perfect neoliberal role. When a system keeps an individual at arm's length, that individual might find it difficult to dedicate themselves to growth of that system, even if that growth is for the greater good.

Second, it contributes to research on contingency by adding the important layer of teaching diversity courses in this precarious position. It is not surprising to find that contingency is stressful or that contingency leads to burnout. It *is* interesting to find that this might impact the way diversity is taught in neoliberal academia. For example, more than 75% of all GE diversity courses in my department are taught by contingent faculty. Not only are they dealing with the stress of their position, they also have to be careful about the choices they make because those choices might impact their potential to teach in the future. To become good at anything, one needs to have practice doing it. Precarious conditions are not ideal conditions for practice as they make it less likely that one might take the risks necessary to teach diversity course. It is hard to care, or to get others to care, in a system that does not show care to you.

Third, it contributes to the existing knowledge on the ways neoliberal academia utilizes diversity without engaging in what it means to become more diverse. As a way to sell themselves in a competitive neoliberal market, universities use diversity as part of their brand. They include diverse photos on their websites, they offer clubs and activities that support marginalized students, and they require a diversity course. This research offers a sliver of a huge picture of what it means to place the bulk of diversity courses on contingent faculty within a department that might not be seen as one responsible for diversity courses. This is especially difficult

because those within the department might not have been prepared to facilitate these types of courses. Adding to this, every contingent faculty member interviewed from my department came from at least one marginalized group. The compounded precarity of these positions weigh at each faculty member. Unsurprisingly, every person I spoke with aimed to be the best instructor as possible, no matter how much burnout or precarity they faced. But, as they receive better union contracts with more agency over their choices, they might choose to teach the courses that do not force them to navigate their own precarity through precarious times. This impacts the way diversity is taught because newer, less experienced instructors are asked to take over these courses. And the burnout cycle happens again.

Fourth, it shows the potential of building stronger connections between contingent faculty within a single department with the goal of teaching diversity in all of our courses. I see this of particular importance because of how invisible contingent faculty become within a university. While CSUN offers forms of affective connection through trainings and other faculty meetings, contingent faculty are not always available to make them. Adding to this, contingency places distance between oneself and the university. The formation of this small support group illustrated the need of others like it. At the same time, the inconsistent attendance showed the importance of flexibility in caring about contingent faculty. They might not be able to read the book. They might not be able to make the meetings. They might not always respond. But, they do need to feel cared for and necessary in their role. Neoliberal academia can be lonely. This support group alleviated some of that loneliness and it also helped round out knowledge of issues that should be presented in all courses, not just those deemed GE diversity ones.

These findings lead me to suggest a few considerations on the macro, meso, and micro scale. On the macro level, I add to the growing call to rethink contingency in academia. Since

contingency looks different in each university system, I focus my call for this on the CSU system. I do this because it is the system I am familiar with, but I do it in solidarity with all of the other contingent faculty throughout neoliberal academia who struggle to teach through precarity. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the CSU system is a part of the tertiary higher education system in California. This system was created with the aim of greater accessibility for all Californians. While it is true that the CSUs get lost in the shuffle between the UCs and the CCCs, they provide a pathway for many marginalized students to receive their degrees. In particular, support systems such as the Equal Opportunity Program, Black Student Union, and Pride Center at CSUN assist in the success of these students. Unfortunately, those who do the teaching of many of these students are not offered the same types of care. Adding to this, many of them are stuck in their position, with no way to move up, little opportunity to be involved in their university, and no support to do research. The CSUs must ask themselves what it means to care about diversity without supporting many of those who do that diversity work.

On the meso level, Chapters Four and Five provide insight in how academia might support contingent faculty who teach GE diversity courses. Based on my years of contingency, I was not surprised to see how many contingent faculty were genuinely concerned about making a change in academia despite being overburdened. I was surprised to see how often those within my department were willing to give me a few minutes of their precious time. They were willing to stick around a few minutes after spending an hour talking with students and before jetting off to another class. Sure, time constraints prevented me from performing traditional interviews, but academia can learn from these interactions by thinking more carefully about how to bring contingent faculty into a department's community. That is, if academia wants to bring them in.

The small successes and failures of the book club might also inform academia of ways they can be more supportive of bringing diverse perspectives to the classroom. While CSUN offers instructors support through faculty development, many difficulties instructors have might be specific to their departments. Small, university-wide teaching groups might be useful for learning different pedagogical techniques, but even smaller, more localized teaching groups allow faculty to approach each other through the same lenses. This is especially true for departments that aim to be interdisciplinary. Our department possesses a wide lens of Communication Studies. Many faculty members in our department aim for social justice to serve the core of the course, but this looks different depending on the focus. For example, a quantitative, social scientific course looks very different from a performance studies course. And a rhetoric course looks different from them. Localized teaching groups provide the space to tease out these differences while also finding themes that could come up in all of the courses, showing students the interconnectedness of these subfields within Communication Studies.

On the micro level, it is clear that contingency needs to be reimagined. Sure, there are ways to offer support to us, but it might also be a good idea to help contingent faculty move up within academia, shift between academia and other parts of the community, or leave academia all together. For now, most contingent faculty come from at least one marginalized group and they do the bulk of the diversity work in neoliberal academia. They are the perfect neoliberal diversity workers, too overworked to build connections with other members of the community and too overworked to do the other type of work that might allow them to move up, around, or out. If universities want to maintain their use of these contingent diversity workers, without providing them the security of a tenured position, then they need to provide pathways for their contingent faculty to be rewarded. While the affective bonds discussed previously might help, these bonds



do little to appease the fear of losing health insurance for an entire family because they made a few students uncomfortable in their intercultural communication course.

On a personal level, this work has shown me there is little room for me in neoliberal academia. While I am interested in helping to reimagine the university system, I have also realized I might not want to fit within the system. My interest in social justice might be better served in a place that does not offer superficial answers to systemic problems. Neoliberal academia molds its workers into the type of homo economicus that is not only concerned with the entrepreneurship of oneself, but holding this concern at the expense of others within the system. At this point, it is obvious that those who do diversity work in neoliberal academia bare too much responsibility despite already being of a marginalized group. But, this exploitation of contingent faculty and others who do this work also comes at the expense of the students. Sure, some contingent faculty stick around and continue to teach GE diversity courses. At the same time, when given the chance to deburden oneself from this responsibility after years of burnout, it is no surprise some will opt out, leaving the course to the less experienced faculty.

### **Making Room for Care in Neoliberal Academia**

If we are to fix the problem of neoliberal academia's exploitation of contingent faculty and its impact on diversity courses, it is important to emphasize praxis over theory right now. Before engaging in future research, academics should consider how to implement the practical possibilities discussed above and/or other changes that support contingent faculty as well as the diversity goals of the universities. It is only after change starts to happen that I suggest the following ideas for future research.

First, universities begin studying the experiences of their contingent faculty. So far, most work on contingent faculty is done by current or former academics in that position. This

dissertation shows the strain placed on contingent faculty while teaching courses, especially GE diversity courses, and conducting research. If I was not in school, it is quite possible that I would have been teaching at multiple schools and would not have been able to conduct this research. Tenured and tenure-track faculty and/or university administrators need to take some of this responsibility. Specifically, this research should focus on the amount of contingent faculty who come from marginalized groups. From my experience, and the research of others, it looks like this is the case. If so, what does this mean for the opportunities that their advanced degrees gave to them? Are these groups earning advanced degrees to only find themselves stuck in contingency? What do their feelings about their position do to how they decide what courses to teach and how they teach them? Are their coalitions in some universities that help bolster contingent faculty?

Second, I hope to see research on ways those universities that might be considered middle tier, such as the CSUs, (dis)allow marginalized communities to imagine their futures. I am especially interested in research focusing on first-generation college students and how they find their place within academia. Much like my interest in contingent faculty, my interest here is personal. Based on my experience and the experiences of those I know, these universities could do much better at bringing these students in. Previous research exists on some colleges, but I am especially interested in systems like the CSUs because, as noted previously, these universities tend to get lost in the financial shuffle. What does this mean for the marginalized students who get accepted into one of them? How do diversity initiatives fail to meet the needs of these first-generation students? Specifically, how does the collapse of ‘diversity’ to mean race and gender (and sometimes class) impact the ways these students navigate their experiences?

Finally, on the methodological end, I look forward to seeing more feminist activist and queer ethnographies to see how these methodologies shape depending on context. For queer ethnography, I cannot wait to see how academics stretch the bounds of ethnography here. Perhaps it would be interesting for queer ethnographers to work with those who do not deem themselves such, shining light on how queer and non-queer ethnographies might work hand-in-hand in grasping a particular subject. For example, it would be interesting to see how Chapter Five would have been done differently by someone who was not forced into queer ethnography. Not better, just different. For feminist activist ethnography, I hope to see more of this within the pedagogy of social justice. I would love to see how some take similar ideas from GE diversity courses to the world outside academia. I imagine the struggle is different from those in academia, but I still imagine struggle. I hope to see research on how marginalized pedagogues bring social justice to their communities.

And this leads me to where I go next. I plan to be one of these pedagogues who brings my knowledge from these GE diversity courses to my community. I am still planning how and where to do this, but my somewhat failed experience in academia revealed to me how unnecessary it was for me to find my place there. The future is out of the ivory tower and into community centers.

## Appendix

### Research Questions for contingent Faculty for Chapter 4

Aim for this interview: Negotiations as instructor doing diversity work in GE diversity courses

1. What brought you to teaching? (ice breaker for group interview)
2. What does an inclusive learning environment look like to you?
3. What courses do you feel take the most out of you emotionally? What about the courses do this?
4. Are there particular courses you prefer not to teach? Or ones you love to teach? Why?
5. How much of a say do you have in which courses you decide to teach?
6. How have you seen the way we talk about diversity change since you started teaching?
7. How does teaching GE diversity courses differ from teaching other ones?
8. Do you feel as if these GE diversity courses are outside of your expertise? Why?
9. How does your identity inform the choices you make as you plan your GE diversity course?
10. How does your identity inform the choices you make as you interact with students in these courses?
11. How does your identity influence the way you relate to your students in general?
12. How does your identity influence the other choices you make as far as the types of diversity work you do outside of the GE diversity courses?
13. Does diversity work lead to other types of stresses?
14. Final Question (this one will be the only one they answer privately, on a sheet of paper): How would you like to be identified in my research? This might include race, gender, sexuality, disability, etc.

## Notes

1. Gabriel (pseudonym). Interview by author. August 14, 2019. CSUN Campus.
2. Joel (pseudonym). Interview by author. September 18, 2019. CSUN Campus.
3. Melissa (pseudonym). Interview by author. August 29, 2019. CSUN Campus.
4. Jinah (pseudonym). Correspondence with author. September 6, 2020. CSUN Campus.
5. Katrina (pseudonym). Correspondence with author. January 30, 2020. CSUN Campus.
6. Jinah second (pseudonym). Correspondence with author. October 11, 2019. CSUN Campus
7. Lindsey (pseudonym). Interview by author. August 30, 2019. CSUN Campus
8. Lindsey (pseudonym). Email correspondence with author. March 10, 2020.

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