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Contingent Writing Center Work: Benefits, Risks, and the Need for Equity and Institutional Change

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Contingent Writing Center Work: Benefits, Risks, and the Need for Equity and Institutional Change

Abstract

This study investigates and reports on the personal, professional, and programmatic benefits and risks associated with contingent writing center work. Interviews were conducted with 48 contingent writing centers workers, including directors, assistant directors, associate directors, graduate student workers, and tutors. Survey data of the interview participants showed contingent writing center workers are usually White women with advanced degrees. Most of this article focuses on interview data, analyzed using grounded theory. Interviews revealed participants' understanding of what contingency means and revealed their struggles with instability, insecurity, and uncertainty even while they lauded the flexibility, freedom, and autonomy their contingency afforded them. The interview data also further revealed the ways in which these working conditions were created and maintained by the institution. These findings suggest the need for collective action across the composition and writing center fields—from professional organizations, tenure-line writing center workers, and contingent workers themselves. Through collective action, we can create equitable working conditions for all writing center workers.

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A writing center director who has held official positions in various writing-centered professional organizations, started the writing center at their institution, and participates regularly in research in the field has a secret: their position is contingent and always has been, but they rarely mention this fact when attending a professional conference because they are embarrassed by their status and think they're the only one in such a position.

A director who has made many scholarly contributions to the field and has been recognized by various professional organizations for their leadership is called into the dean's office at the end of the academic year. The dean informs the director that the writing center the latter has directed for thirty years is being moved to student services, so their role as director will no longer be needed. The director is offered the option of returning to taking their full load through traditional classroom teaching, but they opt to retire instead.

A director who attempts to run their writing center according to best practices is met with resistance by three powerful colleagues in the writing program. Constant disrespect coupled with a lack of real job security leaves the director feeling marked, stuck, and scared. Their position is not on the tenure line and does not come with any of the protections, autonomy, or standing that the previous director enjoyed. These conditions, coupled with a lack of real job security, eventually become too much, and the current director leaves the field.

A graduate student turns down a teaching assistantship to accept a job on a graduate assistantship as the assistant director of a writing center. But they learn that a new tenure-line writing program director wants to rethink the structure of the writing center. The graduate student cannot get their teaching assistantship back, and now they need to reapply for the assistant director job they just obtained.

A professional writing tutor has worked steadily at a writing center for years, regularly receiving glowing reviews from the director and student visitors, many of whom return to work with this tutor specifically semester after semester. When the COVID-19 pandemic hits, the tutor is instrumental in helping their director move the center's operations online. That summer, though, the tutor receives a call from their director: the writing center's budget has been slashed by nearly 70%, with the pandemic fallout cited as the cause. The tutor is laid off.

A peer writing tutor of color notices that White students who visit the center are actively avoiding them. Despite feeling that their status as a student doesn't really afford them any authority, the tutor approaches their writing center director to talk about their experience. The director reminds the tutor that students can choose the tutors with whom they work. The peer writing tutor doesn't know where to turn to get help with what they see as a serious problem.

These are everyday stories of part-time and full-time contingent writing center workers. These stories speak not only to the precarity of individual contingent writing center workers' positions but also to the ways in which their precarity affects their centers, the students served, and the field of writing

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center studies, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. This crisis has spotlighted the ubiquity of precarity and the fact that institutions of higher education will enact what Naomi Klein (2008) called "disaster capitalism" at any time (p. 11). In "Academe's Coronavirus Shock Doctrine," Anna Kornbluh (2020) suggested that "the history of capitalist crisis" shows that "reinventions" have historically "come at the expense of average workers" (para. 7). If doing so serves their bottom line, executives in the academy will fire academic workers; shutter departments, programs, or centers; and leave whole disciplines out to dry under the banner of purported necessity. And all too often, these cuts are inadequately opposed or altogether unopposed, especially by those who are most vulnerable and inadequately positioned to bear the risky burden of opposition.

Despite marked growth in the number of contingent positions from the mid-twentieth century to the time of COVID-19, contingency as a work status remains dangerously invisible in the field of writing center studies, as evidenced by the first, and poorly attended, special interest group on contingency that two authors of this article held at the 2014 NCPTW/IWCA Conference in Orlando, Florida. Only two attendees joined the organizers. And the lack of attendance at that first special interest group, especially by leaders of the writing center field, is unsettling because so many writing center leaders espouse equity and social justice and because research shows that a large majority of writing center staff work on contingent lines. According to the 2016–2017 survey conducted by the Writing Centers Research Project, a total of 53% percent (n = 104) of writing centers were classified as directed by contingent employees during that time period (Question 86).[1] And the 2017 survey of four-year institutions conducted by the National Census of Writing shows similar results. Of the 240 respondents to the question "How is the Writing Center Administrator (WCA) position classified?" just 28% (n = 68) indicated the WCA was a tenure-track faculty member, while the remaining 72% (n=172) of respondents indicated the WCA was either a non-tenure track faculty member or an indeterminate "hybrid faculty/staff" member.[2] And the results are similar in the 2013 two-year college version of the survey

1 Of the 197 respondents to the 2016–2017 Writing Centers Research Project survey, 63 (32%) noted that their center was directed by non-faculty professional staff (full or part-time); 35 (18%) noted that their center was directed by non-tenurable faculty (full-time); five (2.5%) noted that their center was directed by part-time faculty; and one noted that their center was directed by a graduate student/assistant (Question 86).

2 Of the respondents, 61 (26%) were non-tenure track faculty members, 80 were classified as staff members (33%), and 31 (13%) were a member of the hybrid category of faculty/staff. The contingency status of the hybrid positions is unclear.

conducted by the National Census of Writing.[3] Emily Isaacs & Melinda Knight (2014) found still more striking percentages, noting in a *WPA* article that 71% of writing center directors held non-tenurable positions (p. 48). Isaacs & Knight also found that 81% of writing centers were staffed by peer tutors (p. 49), contingent writing center workers of an arguably less visible variety than contingent writing center directors. Writing center worker contingency is similarly invisible in the broader field of rhetoric and composition. The 2016 Indianapolis Resolution was conceived of by the College Composition and Communication Convention (CCCC) Labor Caucus in 2014 to address matters involving academic labor, and it mentions five professional organizations of interest (Cox, Dougherty, Kahn, LaFrance, & Lynch-Biniek, 2016); however, it only briefly acknowledges contingent writing center directors and does not mention the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) at all—even though many writing center workers belong to that organization as well as to the five other professional organizations the resolution mentions.

Our research, which was partially funded by an IWCA grant, makes contingent writing center workers' experiences more visible to those within the field of writing center studies and to those in writing studies more broadly. The study originated with our growing concern about the continued proliferation of contingency in the writing center field and awareness of its effects on directors and centers alike. But it also stemmed from our own experiences with contingency. We were all serving in contingent writing center positions when we began this research, and, as a group, we have worked in contingent writing center positions for a combined total of 71 years as undergraduate peer tutors, professional tutors, graduate student assistant directors, graduate student tutors, contingent faculty directors, and staff directors. (Though two of us currently work on tenure lines, only one of us has ever held a tenure-line writing center position.)

Our research both draws on and extends the conversation among existing scholars of contingency in the field of writing studies, most notably Marc Bousquet (2008); Donna Strickland (2011); and Seth Kahn, William B. Lalicker, & Amy Lynch-Biniek (2017). In *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*, Bousquet argued that contemporary universities prioritize "the principle of revenue maximization" and "cost containment" (p. 1). Universities create conditions for employment of the

3 Of the two-year college respondents to the question, "How is the WCD [Writing Center Director] or LCD [Learning Center Director] position classified?" 28 identified the position as held by a tenure track faculty member (32%) with 53 (58%) respondents either identifying the position as being held by a non-tenure track faculty member or a staff member. The remainder of the positions were again identified as being held by those in the innocuous "hybrid faculty/staff" category (10 respondents, or roughly 10%).

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kind that Strickland examined in *The Managerial Unconscious in the History of Composition Studies*, which "makes a case for understanding the history of the field of composition studies as the history of the increasing importance of managers of the teaching of writing" (p. 17); Strickland further called for "the field of composition studies to bring a critical, curious, and even skeptical attention to writing program administration" (p. 18). Informed by Strickland's invitation to writing studies scholars and professionals to scrutinize administration through the lens of management, Kahn, Lalicker, & Lynch-Biniek, editors of *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition*, explained in the introduction to the collection that they focused on the managed as opposed to the managers, expressing their "twin goals of fighting both adjunct exploitation and the denigration of composition studies" and mapping out paths toward solidarity among workers across ranks in higher education (p. 7).

In turn, our project complements and adds to the limited amount of existing research on writing center labor by writing center scholars, most notably by Anne Ellen Geller & Harry Denny (2013) and by Nicole I. Caswell, Jackie Grutsch McKinney, & Rebecca Jackson (2016). In "Of Ladybugs, Low Status, and Loving the Job: Writing Center Professionals Navigating their Careers," Geller & Denny reported on interviews with a mix of contingent and tenure-line writing center workers and exposed a key problem: "The very aspects of WCPs' positions that turn out to be the most important to their success and satisfaction are at tension with the academic cultural actions that feed disciplinary growth and could position WCPs as central agents in the discipline of English" (p. 97). Along the same lines, in *The Working Lives of New Writing Center Directors*, Caswell, Grutsch McKinney, & Jackson reported on interviews conducted with different kinds of writing center directors, among them contingent ones, and the authors argued that writing center work comes out of a complex range of rationales and motivations, involves a range of emotional experiences, and "cannot be typified" (p. 10). Interestingly, our research showed that from 2005 to 2020, fewer than 10 articles in *Forum: Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty* focused on writing center contingency, and these articles generally focused on the authors' own experiences as contingent writing center directors as opposed to the problem of contingency in a broader sense. Most notably, Lacey Wootton (2020) touched on how the seemingly powerless contingent writing center director can speak to power despite the obvious contradictions in such a stance. As another example, Elizabeth Busekrus (2014) explored the ironies of contingency, noting that contingent faculty have more freedom through the role of a "middle man" between administration and students, despite, in this case, being literally consigned to the basement (p. A6).

Finally, our research adds to scholarship by Denny (2010a), who reshaped the field of writing center studies through the publication of *Facing the*

Center, which posited writing-centered one-to-one mentoring work is identity work and laid groundwork for more recent scholarship on social justice, such as Laura Greenfield's (2019) *Radical Writing Center Praxis: A Paradigm for Ethical Political Engagement*. As Al Gini (2001) explained in *My Job, My Self: Work and the Creation of the Modern Individual*, "Whether we have a good job or a bad one, whether we love it or hate it, succeed in it or fail, work is at the center of our lives and influences who we are and all that we do" (p. 2). Work is a kind of category that marks individuals and/or can be claimed as an identity, much like race, class (broadly construed), gender, sexuality, nationality, faith, ability, and other identities can be claimed. Like Denny (2010b), who explored queer identity and writing center work in "Queering the Writing Center," we are interested in confrontations with "marginality" (p. 96). And similar to Greenfield & Karen Rowan (2011), who investigated writing centers and racism, we are invested in "dismantling systems of injustice" akin to those that keep Black scholars and other scholars of color on the margins of the academy (p. 9). As Ibram X. Kendi (2019) observed, racism and capitalism function as "[c]onjoined twins" in contemporary contexts (p. 156). To reference Talisha Haltiwanger Morrison's (2019) argument in "Being Seen and Not Seen," we are concerned about the politics of visibility and invisibility. And like Anna Sicari (2019), a scholar of gender and writing center work who draws attention to the problem of "policing" women's bodies in writing centers, we are concerned about policing, though of a different variety (p. 115). In writing centers, the privileged few executives police the disenfranchised many, keeping the latter away from privileged decision-making and other activities reserved for the tenured elite. The privileged few create and sustain contingency because contingency keeps their time, salaries, benefits, and jobs safe, stable, and intact.

Our research takes a new approach to the subject of contingency by investigating and reporting on the personal, professional, and programmatic risks and benefits associated with contingent writing center work by directors, assistant directors, associate directors, graduate student workers, and professional and peer tutors. In our participants' experiences, we see a paradox of social class, which Michael Zweig (2000) in *The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret* claimed is "in large part based on the power and authority people have at work" (p. 3). Our participants perceived themselves to have power in their jobs, but they lacked power within institutions. In part because of this paradox, a range of personal and professional risks for our participants emerged, most notably involving the participants' impoverished living conditions, emotional and professional instability, lack of professional identity, lack of job security and advancement opportunities, and lack of authority over decisions affecting the participants' writing centers. Likewise, a range of programmatic and institutional risks emerged because our participants could not advocate for themselves or their centers without putting their own jobs at risk.

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We argue that to diminish these and other professional and programmatic risks, the writing center and composition fields must address the binary professional dynamic that Neal Lerner (2006) described as the "terrain of our field" that "seems separated into two types of directors: an active, enfranchised group with faculty or secure status and a part-time, contingent—and largely silent—group doing the best they can do under very difficult conditions" (p. 10). The authors of the 2016 Indianapolis Resolution described this phenomenon as a "caste system" (Cox, Dougherty, Kahn, LaFrance, & Lynch-Biniek, p. 38). Members of the composition and writing center fields need to see that changing that system is necessary and possible—even if, in the words of Lerner, our "progress" might "seem to move at a glacial pace at times" (p. 10). We hope that our research helps break the glacial ice and helps the writing center and composition fields come to a clearer understanding of what contingency is and what it does to directors, their writing centers, the staff members who work there, and the students writing centers serve. Advancing this understanding is particularly important for those who lead our professional organizations and for other "active, enfranchised" members of the field (Lerner, 2006, p. 10) who may be further removed from the material, day-to-day effects of contingency, but whose voices and reach can resonate the furthest. Through obtaining a clearer sense of contingency, all members of our field can commit to working in collaborative, caring, and ethical solidarity with one another to effect change. All members of our field can engage in collective action—regardless of whether they work at institutions with unionized faculty—and begin the process of changing labor practices. And through collective action, all members can, at the very least, diminish the toxic effects of contingency or, even better, eliminate contingent status altogether.

Methods

We obtained IRB approval and began our study by circulating a call for participants via social media and listservs such as WCENTER, SSWC-L and WPA-L, which cater to writing center professionals. Our call invited interested participants who were 18 years of age or older and held (at that time) or had held (within the previous five years) a contingent position in a writing center. In this call, we made clear that writing center workers at every level were invited to participate, and we defined "contingent" broadly. As stated in the call, we invited "directors whose positions are non-tenurable (i.e., faculty, term, temporary, interim, adjunct, clinical, visiting, instructional, and affiliate); assistant directors (staff, faculty, or graduate assistant); student tutors; staff consultants; and other writing center staff." Interested potential participants were then directed to complete a five-minute eligibility survey via Qualtrics through which we collected their contact information. Wanting to reach as

many contingent writing center workers as possible, we recruited interested potential participants over a span of nine months. A total of 109 individuals responded to the initial call during this time, and of those, 48 responded to our follow-up request for a thirty- to sixty-minute interview. All 48 participants gave informed consent.

Interview questions[4] were designed to capture a range of descriptive detail about the working lives of participants. We also offered participants the opportunity to discuss issues that we did not ask about. Specific questions that asked about the benefits and risks of contingency included the following:

- What if any benefits do/did you perceive by virtue of your employment status?
- What if any risks do/did you perceive as existing because of your employment status?
- What if any actions do/did you take to diminish these risks?
- What would/did help you to diminish these risks?
- What actions do/did you opt against taking to diminish these risks, and why do/did you opt against taking them?

We conducted interviews with the 48 participants over 18 months. We used Uberconference, a phone/computer assisted interface, to interview and record the majority of participants' responses, but we conducted four of the interviews in person, which were recorded with a voice recorder, at the 2015 National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing in Salt Lake City, Utah.

We transcribed the interviews and, using a random name generator tool that required us to gender names, we assigned each participant a pseudonym. We opted to use first and last names for each participant because of our volume of participants. All identifying information (such as institution, geographic details, etc.) was removed from the transcripts. Transcripts were then given back to participants for review, and participants had the opportunity to amend or clarify any comments or suggest the removal of any identifying information that had been missed in the transcription process.

After participants approved the transcripts, we reviewed the responses to our interview questions and used grounded theory to guide our initial approach to coding and analysis to capture the scope and complexity of our participants' experiences. Independently, we each began open coding the responses to each question, working to identify and define repeated concepts. After this open coding, we compared and discussed the codes each of us found, noting areas of overlap and the multiple interpretations that emerged. From this conversation, we drafted a list of codes that reflected the broad range of our participants' experiences.

4 Interview questions available from the authors upon request.

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DOI: 10.7771/2832-9414.1969

To norm our coding, we each coded one interview transcription, double-checked one another's coding, and talked through our observations. We discussed whether our codes captured participants' experiences, and we noted moments in the transcriptions when the words of our participants received more than one code. Once we finalized our codes, we made sure that each question was coded by at least two members of our team and that any disagreements over these assigned codes were resolved. After this coding process, we counted the frequency of each code. We then grouped the most frequent codes into themes that appeared throughout participants' responses.

Finally, we conducted a demographic survey, asking our participants about gender identity, age, marital status, and racial/ethnic identity. We then correlated those demographic data with data we had collected from the original eligibility survey about position type and degree status.

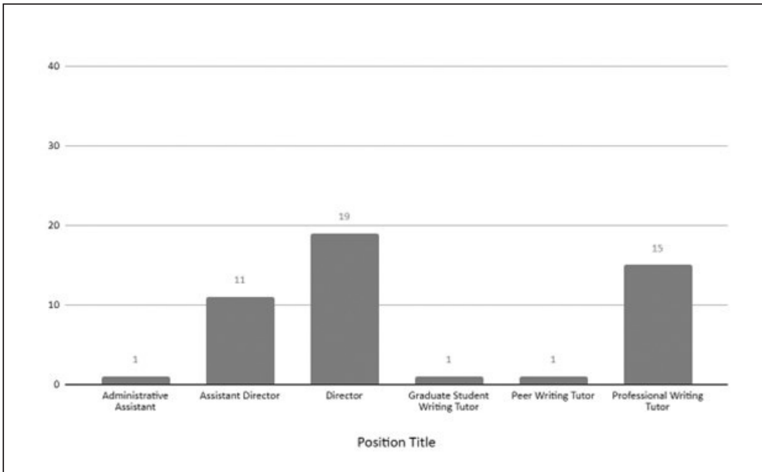
Results and Discussion

Demographics

While we collected demographic information at the end of each interview, we present this information first, as these demographics should provide readers with a sense of our participants. In this section, we detail position titles, hours worked per week, education level, racial identity, gender identity, and union membership.

Participant position titles were standardized to director, assistant director, professional tutor, graduate student writing tutor, peer tutor, and administrative assistant since the answers our participants gave were often specific to institutions. As Figure 1 shows, 19 participants were directors, 11 were assistant directors, 15 were professional tutors, one was a graduate student writing tutor, one was a peer tutor, and one was an administrative assistant.

Figure 1
*Standardized Position Title by Participant (*n *= 48)*



The 48 participants interviewed occupied two distinct categories of position types, hourly and salaried, and all but one participant held at least one degree. The majority of participants were salaried (30, or 62.5%), while fewer than half were hourly employees (18, or 37.5%). Ten of the 48 participants were union members, while 36 were not; two participants were not asked their union membership status.

Twenty four participants worked 40 hours or more, and 24 worked fewer than 40 hours per week, as shown in Figure 2. This even split was not maintained when we considered whether the participants were full- or part-time employees because five participants who worked fewer than 40 hours per week indicated they worked more than 30 hours per week, which is the federal designation for full-time employment with benefits (Internal Revenue Service, 2021).

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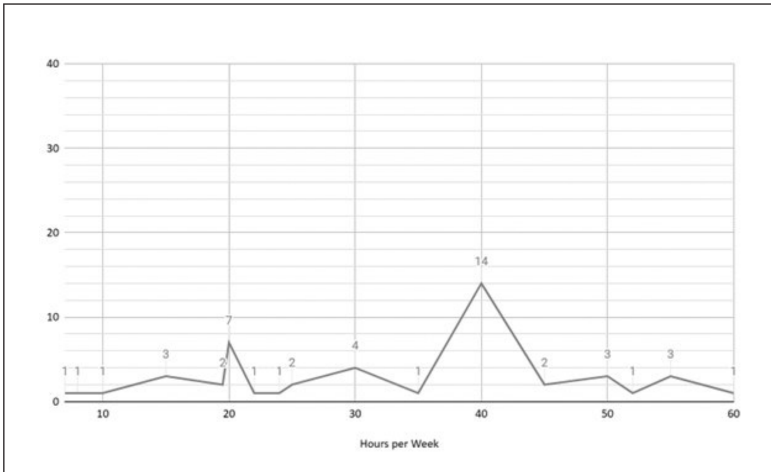
Figure 2

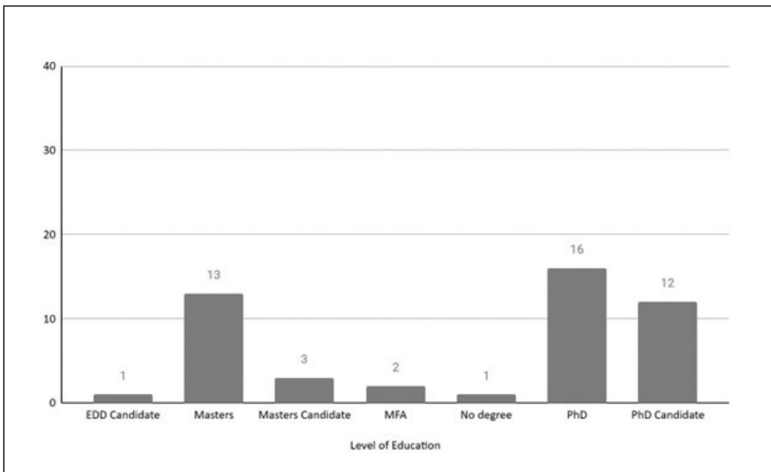
Number of Hours Worked per Week by Participant (n = *48*)



The overwhelming majority of our participants were enrolled in or had completed graduate degrees (47 participants) with 16 participants holding PhDs, 12 PhD candidates, and one EdD candidate. Of the remainder, 15 held master's degrees and three were master's candidates. Only one participant had no degree at all. The educational levels of the participants are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

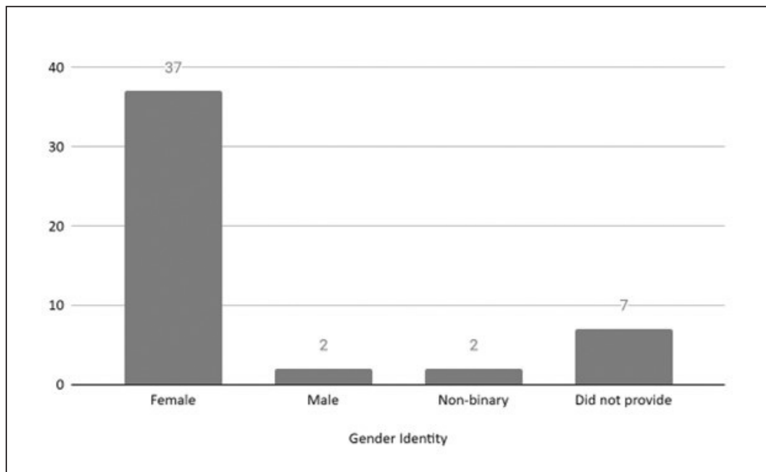
Educational Level by Participant (n = *48*)



As Figure 4 indicates, 37 of our participants identified as female, two identified as male, and two as non-binary. Seven participants did not provide gender identity information.

Figure 4

*Gender Identity by Participant (*n *= 48)*



Thirty-nine participants identified as White, two identified as Asian, one as Black, and one as Jewish culturally and ethnically (as self-described), while seven offered no racial or ethnic identity information.[5] Only one participant identified Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin. The racial identities of our respondents are shown in Figure 5.

5 One participant identified as multiracial and selected two races; one participant identified as Hispanic/Latinx/Spanish along with another race; thus, the total number of responses for this question was 51.

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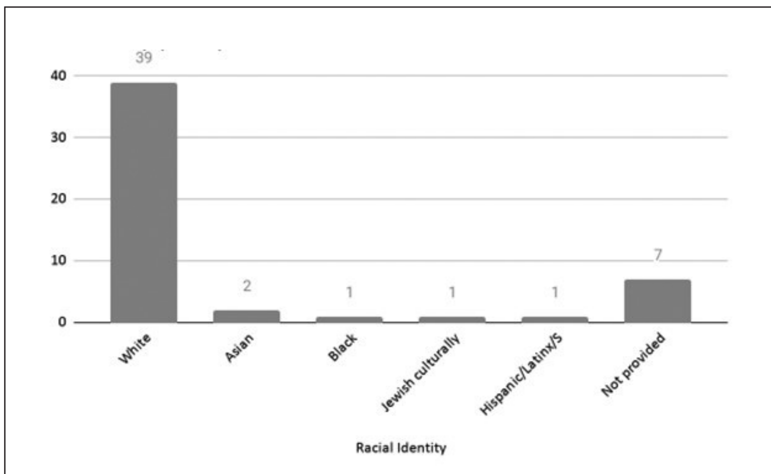
Figure 5
*Racial Identity by Participant (*n *= 48)*



Overall, our participants' demographics align in comparison with others' external surveys.[6] As we reflect on our participants, we note that a large majority identified as White women. In an effort to protect participants' identities, when quoting from them in the following sections, we avoid associating specific demographic markers with their responses, except for the gendered names provided by the random name generator we used. We also avoid mentioning individual participants' position types when quoting from them because we want readers to see as credible a range of contingent voices, regardless of their job titles. The workers in our study do what many of us have come to know as traditional writing center work: consultations, managerial work, service, cross-campus or community outreach and collaboration, and instructional design.

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6 Neither the Writing Centers Research Project (2016-2017) nor the National Census of Writing (2017) collected information about gender or racial identities, so we could not compare our participants' demographics to those benchmarks. Citing various demographic studies done between 1995 and 2014, Sarah Banschbach Valles, Rebecca Day Babcock, & Karen Keaton Jackson (2017) noted that of the writing center administrators considered, "approximately 1 in 4 was male in 1995 (74% female); approximately 1 in 5 was male in 2004 (80% female); approximately 1 in 4 was male in 2013 (71% female); approximately 1 in 4 was male in 2014 (73% female)" (Gender section). These surveys only offered binary female/male choices. As for racial identity, Valles, Babcock, & Jackson found the vast majority of participants they surveyed as part of their research identified as White (91.3% of 266 participants) with 3.9% identifying as multiracial, 2.9% as African American, 1.6% as Hispanic, and 0.3% as Asian, as represented in Figure 10 in their report.

Understanding Contingency

Notably, one of our interview questions invited participants to define contingency because we sought to understand whether our definitions and participants' definitions corresponded. Numerous participants indicated a collective sense of uncertainty about what constitutes contingent labor, as evidenced by the wide range of responses participants provided. Participants defined contingent labor as part-time employment; adjunct employment; staff or administrative employment; indefinite, temporary, or uncertain employment; non-contractual or term-contract employment (including by semester or year); freelance employment; non-benefited employment; unvalued employment or disrespected labor; employment that lacks institutional support (including resources and protection); vulnerable employment; student or entry-level employment; exploitative employment; non-faculty or non-teaching employment; non-tenure-track employment; cheap labor; disposable labor; and controlled or non-autonomous labor (e.g., labor that fails to afford academic freedom).

As we examined the emergent themes, we were particularly struck by how many of them pointed to contrasts and contradictions that characterized participants' working lives, complicating Kahn, Lalicker, & Lynch-Biniek's (2017) claim that "the discourses around contingency tend toward one of three sorts: hollow (but certainly well-intentioned) exhortations; dramatic (often justifiably so) depictions of abusive exploitation; or a combined anger and despair" (p. 6). However, we found responses that fell outside of these three sorts. For example, 41 participants described flexibility, freedom, and autonomy as desirable benefits of contingent positions. However, 34 participants described instability, insecurity, and uncertainty as risks and characterized contingent work as undesirable. Often, the same participants shared two very different responses to contingency. By presenting and interpreting results of participants' experiences with freedom, flexibility, and autonomy *and* with instability, insecurity, and uncertainty, we explore this paradox, as well as the institutional conditions that allow it to exist.

The Benefits of Freedom, Flexibility, and Autonomy

Our participants described experiencing in their jobs moments of freedom, flexibility, and autonomy, pointing to these as benefits of their precarious positions. In these moments, our participants suggested they perceived having power on the job of the sort that Zweig (2000) discussed. This was true of participants who worked as part-time adjuncts, arguably the most exploited labor, and full-time contingent workers with longer-term (e.g., year-long) contracts. These participants perceived themselves as having power on the job because they had power over the conduct of their work in the writing center—even though they tended to exist as the most disposable, replaceable, and disempowered workers in the academic hierarchy. And participants' perceptions of

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themselves as free and their positions as flexible invite consideration of the relationship between freedom, on the one hand, and exploitation, on the other. Whereas, in her consideration of writing programs, Strickland (2011) asked, "When does leadership become exploitation?" particularly for the many White women who inhabit these "ideologically coded" spaces (p. 16; p. 24), we ask the following about writing centers and their workers: Where does freedom end, and where does exploitation begin in workers' perceptions? Or are these workers, most of whom are White women, even aware of the paradox? How does the illusion of freedom in contingent work enable labor exploitation and shape writing centers as classed spaces in accord with the conceptualization Lerner (2006) presented and as a complement to the classed writing programs Strickland (2011) explored? Moreover, how does the illusion of freedom contribute to the classing of gender?

Freedom and autonomy took on different forms in participants' perceptions, and our participants' responses build on and give texture to Kahn, Lalicker, & Lynch-Biniek's (2017) claim that contingent faculty in writing programs "are contingent for many reasons, sometimes willingly and sometimes not" (p. 4). Some of our participants spoke about autonomy in terms of the freedom to take a contingent writing center job because of their privileged economic circumstances. These participants said they could work for low pay and without job security and still remain relatively comfortable because they had partners whose incomes provided family support—a privilege relatively few of our other participants appeared to have. For instance, as participant Tami Kim observed,

> I have the confidence of knowing that if it all fell apart for some crazy reason—like if I lost my job—we aren't going to starve here. I'm married to a man, and we've worked out a situation, and I'm far enough along in my life, you know, no one's going to starve.

Similarly, Sierra Soto observed how her privilege allowed her to have a contingent job, and she, too, acknowledged that others may lack that privilege. As she put it, "I'm fortunate because I've been able to live off my partner's income, but others don't have that." Sierra shows an awareness of the fact that a range of circumstances brings contingent writing center workers to contingent work. Having another's salary on which to rely and relative economic security are important factors.

Numerous participants appreciated their contingent positions for the flexibility and freedom to spend time with family members, whether children, partners, or elderly relatives needing care. As participant Jennifer Armstrong explained, spending time with her children was important to her, and she believed a contingent writing center position allowed that, presumably better than a tenure-track job would. In her words,

> What's been a real benefit is the flexibility. My kids are teenagers now.

> When I started this particular position, my youngest was just barely four. So that's been important: the flexibility and the ability to fit other things into my life other than work.

Another participant, Elisa Daniels echoed Jennifer's sentiment, but instead of noting time to spend with children, she noted she could tend to her elderly parents' needs. In Elisa's words,

> One thing I'll be sort of less happy about if I end up in a twelve-month contract is I do appreciate having the summers. I have elderly parents… and it's nice to get to spend some time, some more significant time with them. It's nice to get more time in… my beloved neighborhood, which I don't always see that much of during the school year.

In addition to citing the ability to attend to family issues as a key benefit of contingent employment, some participants cited appreciating contingent positions for scheduling flexibility and freedom to attend to personal matters, such as health issues. Participant Jada Whittington observed,

> One benefit I would say—and this may be unique to [my institution], I'm not sure—but the flexible hours and you know, having my own health issues, and sometimes I've had to decrease the number of hours in a particular semester. Sometimes even halfway during the semester, I just realize that this is—I've gotten a little bit over my head, and I'm going to have to back off, and having that flexibility has been a godsend, honestly.

Other participants made subtle or perhaps more overt note of the unofficial nature of unpaid sick time that they were given the opportunity to take. For instance, Charlotte Warrick celebrated the flexibility she had while acknowledging the risks inherent to the off-the-books nature of that flexibility:

> When I was pregnant with my baby, I didn't qualify for FMLA because I didn't work enough hours, and I'm also not a *real* employee, so it was very risky having to trust my boss that they would give me a makeshift maternity leave and indeed my job would still be there for me when I got back because by law, they did not have to do that for me.

And Raquel Green mentioned that she had no official sick days, though she still saw the ability to tend to her own health as a job benefit:

> The benefit was that I wasn't hourly. I could be sick. Like take a sick day. Even though I didn't technically have sick days, I could stay home from work one day and not have it be reflected in my pay.

Raquel continued,

> Because I was being paid so little, that would have, like, drastically taken a chunk out of something if one day I was sick and I had to stay home and then I didn't get paid for it. So that was definitely a benefit… of my job over my friends' jobs.

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Some participants, too, felt their contingent positions offered flexibility to pursue personal interests or determine particular living conditions. Harriet Hill said she could engage in the arts because her contingent job left time to do so:

> There have been benefits in that it has given me—because I'm not full time—it has given me time to pursue some other things that I am interested in. There's several art areas that I'm quite active in, and I've actually been able to start to make a little bit of income from it....

Vicki Rhodes made a similar remark:

> I guess there's also that lack of pressure to publish that I can go home and garden or hang out with my spouse and not have, "oh I need to get this article revised" or all those extra pressures, that is nice.

And Sharon Powell agreed, though she spoke more generally than Harriet or Vicki: "I feel as though I have excellent control over my life, that my work can be prioritized at certain times, but my personal life can also be prioritized at certain times." Tanya Johnson, who, in her position, tutored exclusively online, appreciated "the flexibility, the ability to live anywhere because of the remote status."

Some participants appreciated the freedom from having to conduct research and publish. Their responses suggest some tenure-line positions may mandate research and publication but not allow sufficient time for workers to conduct and publish enough research to keep their jobs. Geller & Denny (2013) gestured toward this sentiment when they remarked that writing center professionals who do not feel pressure to publish may feel happier in their jobs than those who do—even if, as these authors suggested, the field of writing center studies, compared to other fields in the academy, may suffer as a result of the absence of scholarship production. Participant Susan Carroll noted not only that research did not inform her administrative work and would actually be a distraction from it but also that writing centers *benefit* when writing center workers are not required to publish:

> I think when this was a tenure-track position, then all the focus is [*sic*] on research and then... it's like, if you're spending a quarter of your time or something being writing center director, that's not effective. I don't think that's ideal for writing centers. So I think that it apportions my time differently so that I can give the center more time than I could if I had a tenure-track position at this particular institution.

Susan was not the only participant to comment on the complex relationship between research and administration. Patricia Cooper wanted the freedom to do research without the requirement:

> Even though I wish I was [*sic*] able to produce more research, I think I'm not evaluated based on my research productivity, and I think that that can be a benefit in some ways because it allows me to focus on expanding

> our services and supporting our staff and our students more. So I think that's kind of a double-edged sword.

While writing center workers may not be required to publish, it seems clear our participants desire their work be recognized *as research* by their institutions.

Nevertheless, other participants exhibited relief about being able to set their own research agendas at their own paces without the prospect of judgment. For instance, Roberto McGee said, "I'm encouraged to research, to publish, to do all these things, but it's not a requirement." He continued, "I'm not being judged or tested in the same way that a faculty member would be." And Molly Forbes celebrated that

> there's no pressure to publish. Anything I do on my own is just for my own benefit, so if I want to publish, I can do it in my own time and on topics that are or are not related directly to the job I've been hired to do here. So I don't feel the pressure on that end.

This celebration of the freedom to publish or not likewise positions research and publication as optional activities. Institutions do not have to pay workers for optional activities, so institutions save money by not paying workers for any optional publishing work—even though institutions benefit from these workers' publications and research.

Participants indicated a similar sense of freedom from engaging in service. Many participants viewed service as an important, and, at times, burdensome, requirement for tenure-track employees and one of the three prongs in the classic trinity of job responsibilities—teaching, research, and service—leading to promotion and tenure. Some participants noted their appreciation for the freedom to choose the service they engaged in. For instance, as Elisa Daniels explained,

> I offered to serve on the assessment committee because I felt that—as someone who didn't have a [Ph.D. in the field], and because I thought the writing center could be of use in assessment—it was something I wanted to learn more about.

Similarly, Vicki Rhodes observed, "I think it is a lot easier to say no to committees if you want to, and departmental events. You could skip out if you wanted to, and no one would really mind." By contrast, most participants appreciated that their contingent positions nearly or altogether provided freedom from service responsibilities. Lena Lawyer said, "I don't have to do as many meetings." She elaborated, "I'm fairly independent." And Judy Greene expressed a similar sentiment: "I don't have to serve on as many committees, and so I think that that's probably the biggest perk of my job, is that there's certain aspects of bureaucracy and service that I can just skip."

Participants noted they appreciated the flexibility of their positions because it allowed them to apply for other jobs and take these jobs if offered—or just quit existing jobs. As Susan Carroll put it,

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DOI: 10.7771/2832-9414.1969

> I feel like I could go elsewhere if things don't work out. So I don't feel held back in that kind of way. I feel frustrated by a lot of aspects of the contingency, but I don't feel held back by it in those terms.

Judy Greene similarly observed that

> one of the strengths of being a contingent employee is that I can always, if a better opportunity arises, I can always pursue that better opportunity and that potentially gives me some negotiating power to say, "hey I've been valuable and I can leave," so that can be, not a heavy-handed negotiating tool, but it does give me the freedom to take other opportunities if other opportunities present themselves.

Elaine Baum more explicitly gestured toward the assumption that tenure-track faculty feel pressure to keep their jobs and cannot move. As Elaine explained,

> I don't feel tied to this position in a way that if I had to make tenure, and then I'd receive tenure, and I was here, that I would feel tied to the position. So if a writing center directorship opened up at another university, I really wouldn't worry too much about switching over.

Allison Foster indicated that the sense of freedom she felt to leave her job signified a sort of impulse that runs counter to stagnation. She said,

> I would finish things out because I like to finish things; I wouldn't leave anyone who has served me well high and dry, stopping in the middle of the semester. But there is a certain freedom on that side, as well. So if things were to change…, I'm not so entrenched that I can't look elsewhere.

She noted,

> I've done it before. I get a little tired of starting over, all over again, but everything has been advancing and opportunities to grow. So, I think my contingency status keeps me from being somewhat stagnant or entrenched or afraid of trying new things.

Julia Cottrell observed, in the memorable form of a question, "I mean, I guess, um, I'm free to apply for all kinds of other jobs?"

Surprisingly, too, some participants highlighted that contingency made them feel as though they had more freedom to speak out about their ideas or campus issues than tenured or tenure-line workers. For example, Kristen Clarke said,

> I have sort of become one of the lecturers in our department that feels very comfortable going to the chair about issues that are facing other contingent faculty—to bring attention to it, to bring awareness to it, offer solutions to talk about it, and to be active in trying to improve the working conditions of the other contingent faculty. And we hear people say things to us like, "well I have to go up for tenure so I can't complain about this or I can't do that. It's too risky to do, like a team teaching thing because I don't know how my course evaluations are going to turn out,"

> you know something along those lines like they feel more constrained.

Kristen concluded that

> many of us feel like the promotions that we get currently are based on our ability to show up and breathe essentially, you know, meet the minimum expectations for a certain amount of time. So that doesn't de-incentivize us from speaking up then, and so I've really appreciated—and being in a department where that has been encouraged—that we have not been actively silenced by any of the upper administrators in our department. It's kind of turned us into little monsters, I think, a little bit in a positive way.

Caryn Whitehouse acknowledged why she felt free to speak up when other contingent co-workers could not:

> At faculty meetings where a lot of my peers, who were also contingent, didn't feel like they could say something, I could. So I was able to put my own self on the line and speak up and say things that, you know, a lot of us were thinking and a lot of them felt like they couldn't say because they were scared that their jobs were on the line. Whereas I knew that—this sounds so brazen and I hate to even say it—but I knew that the director couldn't really fire me—not the director, but the chair of the department—because my contract wasn't in his hands. My contract was in another dean's hands.

Ursula Hughes's remarks suggest that some contingent workers even feel a unique sense of freedom to speak out about not only departmental or pedagogical issues but also labor exploitation, especially as the end of time at an institution draws near. As Ursula put it,

> So I think that's been the thing that I've been thinking over is, can I, in whatever privilege or higher status by virtue of my being almost done with the program, can I speak to someone and just say, "you should pay them more."

She laughed and explained, "they're doing the exact same amount of work as me and there's really no explanation for why it was ever lowered."

Although participants described freedom, flexibility, and autonomy in terms of benefits associated with contingency, these benefits may be complicated by the degree of privilege participants may or may not possess. The freedom to speak to authority, for example, can be especially fraught for BIPOC writing center workers, as Wonderful Faison & Anna Treviño (2017) poignantly addressed, describing how their own authority as experts has been disrespected by students and colleagues alike:

> I have also had many tutees assume (1) I am the receptionist or (2) that whatever coffee I just made must have been for them. When talking with other white tutors about this raced if not racist response to me, I was often called sensitive, given blank stares, or a metaphorical wag of their

https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/wcj/vol39/iss1/14
DOI: 10.7771/2832-9414.1969

> fingers suggesting I should drop the issue and move on. (Guess Who's Coming to Dinner section)

We must acknowledge, then, that the freedom to speak up/speak out that some of our participants—mostly White—described is a freedom contingent workers of color may not feel. What participants may have characterized as a benefit of contingency could also—or instead—be an unacknowledged benefit of racial privilege. Indeed, other participants acknowledged that speaking out was not an option for them, but rather a risk. We explore that and other risks in the next section.

The Risk of Instability, Insecurity, and Uncertainty

Although our participants' experiences pointed to freedom, flexibility, and autonomy as benefits of contingent writing center work, contingency also came with a hefty price. Participants described lived experiences of great risk that affected the participants personally and professionally and affected their writing centers. We identified the theme of "instability, insecurity, and uncertainty" in remarks made by 34 out of 48 total participants, representing the greatest risks of contingent positions. The instability, insecurity, and uncertainty contingent writing center workers feel exist in peculiar interplay with the celebration of freedom, flexibility, and autonomy, affecting the personal lives of our participants in ways that counter the work-life benefits flexibility affords, most notably by perpetuating impoverished conditions and inhibiting workers' sense of emotional stability. Raquel Green illustrated ways in which her contingent labor led to poverty, observing,

> One of the biggest risks was I did not know if I officially had a job the following semester. It was always an unspoken thing that we always had that job until we didn't want it anymore. But with the change in management, that changed. And so as I saw that change in management happening, I became more aware of how that was just a nicety and not a reality. And then I didn't have health insurance. I was very poor. Very poor. So that just leads to living in very poor condition housing, and eating very poorly, my health took a toll for sure. Just being at that level of poverty comes with its own risks.

Further, Jessica Bisson illustrated the emotional toll of contingency. As she put it, "It scares me more than anything, you know? Just the idea that...at any point, you know, your contract could just not be renewed." Susan Carroll noted that frustration existed as a constant reality for her emotionally. She said,

> They can get rid of me at any time, and they make it very clear in the contracts that I should not expect or assume reappointment. So it's a little frustrating that if I do stay here, I'll have to continually prove myself every few years. Indefinitely.

And Jeffrey Martinez intimated that feelings of insecurity not only affected him but also his family. He said that "as somebody with a family, with two

small children, the biggest risk is simply that I have no promise of long-term employment." Jeffrey continued,

> Partly that's because I'm a graduate student, but I think that even members of the administrative team that are staff and that have worked here for a very long time don't actually have any real job security beyond the end of the semester.

He concluded, "I think that state of secure insecurity. I think it just makes it that much harder to do long-term planning and to keep an eye on the goals of the center."

In addition to damaging contingent writing center workers' material and emotional conditions, participants noted that instability caused them to struggle to see themselves as having professional careers. Barbara Francisco described transiency as partially beneficial although also disruptive: "I kind of look at it almost like it will help me to get to a better position. I mean, I don't plan to be here forever." But Amy Briggs said that "because things shift and can shift really rapidly, it's really easy to sort of lose track of what you—what you see yourself doing as a scholar and as a professional." Jada Whittington said, "Pay increases are very slow and very small. So it's not—contingent employment is not something you can build a career out of. It's not something that you could have any sort of financial independence or necessarily stability from it." And Lena Lawyer indicated that years of success ultimately don't matter:

> Well, you know I worry about having a job. I mean my husband says, "Look! You run the writing center and teach online courses. They're never going to let you go. You've been there for a long time." And I say, "Yes, I've done all this work. I've done important work to help students. I've tried to do all this stuff for the university, and still if it came down to dollars, they wouldn't care about any of that."

Participants believed they could only sustain professional identities when willing to work for peanuts. Eva George noted her contingent position allowed the institution to save "in ways that they wouldn't be able to if the salary were higher, if it were a full-time faculty position on the other side. So, [my contingent position] saves the institution money." Similarly, Elaine Baum felt able to remain in her position because the institution had "got a good deal going on right now." Participants understood their institutions saved money by employing them on contingent lines.

The contingent nature of writing center positions carries risks for students, too, pointing toward the adage that teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions. As Bousquet (2008) put it, "*Cheap teaching is not a victimless crime*"; instead, it "hurts everyone, not just the persons who teach cheaply" (p. 41). And instability for writing center workers begets pedagogical problems and pedagogical instability because individual workers and institutions must operate under the pretense that workers might not be present

https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/wcj/vol39/iss1/14
DOI: 10.7771/2832-9414.1969

from semester to semester or year to year. Lack of continuity among writing center personnel caused by the instability of contingent positions inhibits students from building meaningful connections with one-to-one educators who support their educational processes. For example, participant Julia Cottrell painted a picture of an unsettling conversation with a student-writer in the writing center:

> I have a student who I've been seeing regularly this semester who said, "Next semester, I want to [come in for tutoring]." And I said, "Well, you can do that, but I won't be here," and they were very upset. So that's, you know, difficult to deal with.

Similar to Julia, Christine Rose reported: "It's not helpful for anybody because the students get attached to you as a tutor, and you never know when you're actually going to be coming back."

Instability for writing center workers leads to problems with developing writing centers and programs. Participant Staci Larson stated that it was "difficult to sort of commit to projects long term or to make changes in policy if I didn't know who was going to be around." Patricia Cooper, too, highlighted the existence of precarious circumstances for writing centers, noting, "I worry that if upper administration changes and the strategic goals and values change that we may lose funding or we may lose staff, including myself, and I think that's particular to my contingent position," indicating that these looming programmatic problems are entirely avoidable. She stated, "Institutions should do whatever they can to keep [good tutors], to make positions permanent, to open the door for more positions to be permanent and give them benefits and those kinds of things and take good care of them." Julia Cottrell explained, "If we took really good care of [workers], they'd stay, they'd flourish, they'd be good at it." Judy Greene echoed Julia, saying, "I feel more vulnerable" and "less inclined to experiment" to develop as a professional. Susan Liles perceived

> a risk when you have to advocate for a program, or advocate for funding, and you have to support what your program needs. There are times where you have to really think about when to speak up and when to bite your tongue.

Judy also noted,

> You can't always be as vocal as you'd like to be, or say no to things that aren't the goal of the center or, you know, be more vocal when you need to support what the center needs and the mission of the center when you are at … risk of saying something and being fired the next day if someone doesn't approve of what you said.

Susan concluded,

> There is always that "How much can I say?" and "How can I respond to people?" Especially if they are not always being nice back to you. So that's definitely one of the big risks. How do you advocate for a program

when you don't always have a voice to advocate?

In turn, contingency creates problems with realizing institutional ideals such as academic freedom and shared governance. Participant Jennifer Armstrong stated that "I just have less power as a part timer." Her remark highlights the foundational problem of powerlessness at institutions that purport to support academic freedom and engage in shared governance, a mode of governance that has potential to create institutional effectiveness and stability. Participant Jessica Bisson noted that sometimes contingency inhibited her from "speaking as vocally as I might about different issues here and there because you really have to decide when you're in a contingent position like this, would I actually fall on my sword for this?" As Jessica elaborated, "It always seems to be a little shifty under your feet. And I have stopped myself from speaking out, at times." Finally, Sarah Cole told an unsettling story involving an inability to advocate for social justice at and through her institution because of her contingency:

> This past spring, this student-led group I'm involved with focused on racism and other forms of oppression at [institution]—I'm the only non-student involved with it—but we did a sit-in—they did a sit-in in [building], the president's office—and occupied the place for twelve hours until they were kicked out. But they had a sit in. They, like, confronted the president, made these demands. I was more on the outside, quietly sending Tweets and emails and making sure everybody was okay. But I felt even a little risky about doing that, and if I had tenure, I would have been in that office with them.

Sarah concluded, "there have been certain actions I've not taken on campus because I am afraid of losing my job, and I want to stay here, even as I want this place to get better."

The quandary that Sarah was in is a typical and problematic one related to institutional status. Greenfield (2019) came to the conclusion that "for some, a center whose mission is so compromised due to institutional pressures that it is violently contributing to the oppression its stewards may in theory wish to dismantle may be better off shut down" (p. 103). However, Greenfield acknowledged that

> for others, that thought is a bit too scary, or quite frankly out of the question—we must grapple with the ways our individual identities afford some of us the privilege to take risks with our jobs and others not. (p. 103)

For many contingent writing center workers, "shutting down" their place of employment and quitting outright is out of the question simply because they have no institutional standing to close a program and their job may be their and their families' only means of survival. For those who cannot easily quit in protest of oppression and injustice, Greenfield recommended subversive approaches to call out institutional inequities or reframe institutional discourse:

https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/wcj/vol39/iss1/14
DOI: 10.7771/2832-9414.1969

> A writing center could engage in purposeful linguistic manipulation by publicly appeasing its skeptics while continuing in private to strategize with tutors about how to radically negotiate their power, ask problem-posing questions, encourage students to consider the sociopolitical implications of their writing, and point students in directions of transforming the classroom, the school, the world! (p. 91)

The risk of instability, insecurity, and uncertainty is exacerbated by the invisibility of our participants, who repeatedly mentioned their invisibility in relation to these themes. The very nature of contingency rendered many of our participants invisible, preventing many of them from adequately advocating for themselves, their ideas, or their centers. Even if there were sympathetic administrators, the contingent workers we spoke to lacked access to them because of status. Aaron Carmack, for example, thought that better access to his dean or other administrator would "maybe show them the impact that we're having on these students." Roberto McGee also felt that lack of access meant lack of voice: "Having access to other people within the college or university…is one place where I know that I don't have much of a voice." And administrators above Roberto ignored his ideas and work. As Roberto explained, "Something that may have taken dozens of hours of meticulous work was not being looked at, not being considered." He concluded, "so I guess personally having more of a voice with those individuals and having an opportunity to better explain the kind of work that's being done at the writing center would be very helpful."

The problems of instability, insecurity, and uncertainty suggest job titles and classification matter. So do access, voice, professional development, shared governance, full-time status, and job permanency. These classifications, drawbacks, and benefits mattered to our participants and impacted students they served. As one participant pointed out, usually students are not aware of differences across job titles. Those differences are a construct of the institution and of academia in general. Students just want help so they can pass their classes and graduate. But, as many participants' stories suggest, contingency leads to a range of personal and institutional problems. It creates the conditions that drive employees and their dependents into poverty or ill health. Contingency also impedes programmatic development and success and thwarts the achievement of institutional goals. Worse, it could hurt students, whose experience of college can become as unstable as the dedicated workforce there to help them meet their learning goals.

Conclusion: Collective Action for Institutional Change

So how do we create institutional change of the kind Greenfield (2017) and other professionals in our field desire? To use Bousquet's (2008) term, what does the "oppositional culture" (p. 13) look like—particularly in the wake

of COVID-19? Many of our participants seemed unsure of how to change their circumstances. Contingent workers cannot alone eradicate contingency. Many of our participants described lacking any way to change their circumstances. Participants discussed the hopelessness of their situations more often than they saw ways out of them. And often those "ways out" we did see participants discuss amounted to the idea of leaving altogether "if things don't work out" or "if a better opportunity arises," as Susan Carroll and Judy Greene respectively noted. By creating circumstances in which individuals are disconnected from the institution and one another, the flexibility, freedom, and autonomy participants saw as benefits of contingency may simultaneously be factors making the possibility of collective action more difficult.

Those participants who did mention ideas for how to change their circumstances often called for educating administrators of writing centers' value. This solution is important, certainly, but it may well be futile. Writing center scholars have suggested this idea for decades, and, as our participants revealed, it hasn't resulted in improved working conditions. In fact, many of our participants readily took responsibility for failures in their institutional structures. And this self-blame concerns us. It is a byproduct of institutional conditions that create and perpetuate contingency. Another byproduct is conversations among some academics who do not see contingency as a problem or who blame contingent workers for what happens to them.

Although contingent workers could have the power to change the system through unionizing, this subject came up surprisingly rarely in our interviews. Within the system as individuals, contingent workers we interviewed lacked power, and putting the onus of systematic change on them is problematic because of their precarity. Though there are more contingent workers than other kinds of workers in the contemporary academic landscape, contingent workers lack the institutional foothold their privileged counterparts with forever-jobs have. And, as our participants indicated, they are often too afraid to raise their voices about their concerns because they fear that they will lose their jobs.

In our view, despite their obvious limitations, professional organizations have power to equip writing program administrators, tenure-line faculty, and other workers who have some semblance of job security to engage in liberating collective action, especially if leaders and members of these organizations engage more fully in the conversations about contingency that happen in or beyond the bounds of IWCA SIGs and conference presentations or listserv conversations and social media threads. Although our participants never mentioned the potential force of professional organizations, these organizations can provide the support that a union might, a reality that is particularly important given how few of our participants—only 10 of 48—were members of unions at workplaces that had unions for contingent employees. Professional organizations can provide funding for research projects, such as this one, that

https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/wcj/vol39/iss1/14
DOI: 10.7771/2832-9414.1969

expose the realities and effects of contingency. And these organizations can commission less-privileged, contingent members of the field to collaborate on crafting, publishing, and maintaining current statements on contingency and working conditions. Contingent workers and their more privileged allies would then have evidence to support arguments for labor justice within institutions. Contingent workers would have rhetorical tools akin to those that unions provide to counter claims about lack of funding or other resources to hire workers with fair pay, real job security, and benefits.

The collaborative process of reshaping academic institutions as more ethical places of employment for all workers is a slow but necessary one. Kahn, Lalicker, & Lynch-Biniek (2017) suggested that the tide has turned in writing programs, explaining, "we have in fact seen a shift towards more proactive stances against poor labor practices," a move that "increasingly includes faculty across ranks; administrators willing to be ethical in their treatment of faculty; and, in short, anybody willing to make common cause to fight exploitation" (p. 7). Consequently, we in the field of writing centers must work together to reconfigure institutional conditions to render writing center workers and writing centers central to institutional missions as opposed to expendable and precarious spaces at the margins of higher education.

As our participants show, dedicated and conscientious writing center workers find ways to see the best in their precarious circumstances. However, the range of benefits that our participants listed only provides minor mitigation to the exploitative and hurtful aspects of the job. In other words, these benefits are not actually benefits despite participants' characterization of them as such. So far, as our participants' experiences indicate, the two-tier system fails to offer equity to all workers. Privileged writing center professionals with job security that contingent workers lack must put their shoulders to the wheel to help these contingent workers. Our call here is for solidarity among all writing center workers and action from those writing center leaders best positioned to organize and present a case for the needs of our field's workers to administrators and executives who exploit contingency as a cost-saving measure. This call for solidarity includes the most exploited faction of writing center workers: peer tutors. Among other benefits, we need to advocate for living wages, tuition breaks, and recognition on college transcripts for the educational work that peer tutors do during their careers. Our field needs to come together to value all contingent writing center workers with secure and stable jobs that pay well and offer insurance and retirement benefits, professional development, advancement opportunities, shared governance, and other rewards for invaluable contributions to scholarly conversations and student success.

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