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Hidden Academics: Contract Faculty in Canadian Universities.

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Hidden Academics: Contract Faculty in Canadian Universities is a thorough and necessary examination of the work life of part-time academic staff in Canadian universities. Largely quantitative in orientation, the sheer numbers in this book are staggering evidence of an emergent hierarchy that segregates part-timers from their full-time peers. Its true significance, however, lies in the meanings attached to these temporary workers, namely, an easy escape for the university's financial problems and a way to decrease the amount of full-time instructional time. Especially compelling here are illustrative quotes on the treatment by colleagues and administrators by other researchers and part-timers themselves. The ugly bottom line is that everyone involved sees part-time faculty as a "necessary evil" and this exacerbates a lack of respect for the things they do, in particular, teaching.

Part-timers' experiences reveal that their treatment as 'marginalized outsiders' silences them and privileges the speech of others at the centre as powerful. Those who learn to live with their inequities tend to internalize the notion that they do not know enough to be able to speak with any authority (Clayton, 1991 as cited in Rajagopal, 2002: 81-82)

An interesting way to look at this book is to explore it as an application of one of the most widely discussed yet least understood aspects of sociology: the production of sociological knowledge. Within this area of the discipline there is an interest in the theoretical terms or concepts that designate or represent categories of things that are unobservable by way of figurative language. One way to look at *Hidden Academics* then, is to see it as an attempt by the author to create and apply terms that unpack this occupational category to give it a place in the academy. Rajagopal explains:

In a job they love, they face obstacles in their day-to-day work that threatens to weaken their spirit and proficiency. They are exasperated that the university denies their continuing presence. They feel that it ignores their perspectives — their reasons for teaching part time, their aspirations, their attitude towards their work, their role in the universities, and their place in the collegium (pp. 87-88).

The definition itself is important here; it posits the existence of the part-timer as a normal feature of the academy. This is noteworthy as the sources of one of the best discussions (pp. 158-9) in this book. In this section, Rajagopal employs the term underclass to part-timers in advancing the argument that they are a systemic feature of an extremely defensive institution that has three academic classes: the underclass (part-timers), the anxious class (normal academics) and the superstars. The point is that the power of the institution is declining and the corresponding lack of control has led to this three-fold split around academic function, gender and rank.

Rajagopal defines the part-timer as:

[T]hose members of an institution's instructional staff who are employed part time and who do not hold appointments with full-time status. Included are those part-time appointees with teaching responsibilities (for instance, as course director, tutorial/seminar leader, laboratory demonstrator/supervisor) (p. 261).

Rajagopal explores other divisions. Within part-timers themselves, there is the difference between what she calls the Classics and the Contemporaries. The Classics are those folk who hold full-time non-academic jobs and whose reason for teaching is a combination of personal stimulation and needed practical skills. They comprise 34.5% of the part-timers and only a third want to enter the academy full-time. Contemporaries are part-timers, who mainly teach part-time but who may have other jobs (including a variety of part-time academic gigs) to make ends meet. Contemporaries make up 65.5% of the part-time faculty complement (p. 68) and a full three-quarters want full-time academic status (p. 69). More males than females are Classics, Contemporaries are more qualified in terms of level of education, and those under 30 years of age are more likely to be Classics, while those over 50 are more likely to be Contemporaries (p. 134-135).

While inherently interesting, Rajagopal is painting a picture of a highly educated, somewhat nomadic figure (she calls them Freeway Fliers) teaching at a number of institutions during all three semesters, while also looking for a permanent post in the academy. Things are worse yet if you are woman. Not surprisingly, we are talking about a disenchanting lot here (Contemporaries especially so); folks seeking an identity, some day-to-day departmental support, and perhaps even a few frills like lead time on job postings and a measure of security.

The book contains a separate discussion of the contract and full-timers relations. Especially interesting are two facts. One is that the part-timers can expect to be treated with more or less empathy depending on whether the full-timer is an Insider (once part-time themselves) or Outsider (no experience as a part-timer). The more important point is that full-timers as a group are both uncomfortable about hiring part-timers and generally anxious to retain the teaching versus research distinction, believing that part-timers should do neither research nor service (p. 179). A full-timer's quote nicely illustrates this ambivalence:

The question of part-time faculty is a difficult one ... We often hire them to help us out during a few sessions here and there. In my view, we should also hire them to allow professors to devote more time to research. The compatibility between research and teaching is questionable. The problem of part-time labour is situated in the heart of this debate. The ideal would be to have more full-time positions in order to avoid two categories of teachers (p. 171).

Rajagopal begins an extended and, at times, distracting discussion that conflates the underclass status of part-time academics to the increasing feminization of the status. The argument goes like this. Neo-liberal economic policies (read ideology) have meant that jobs have become "less good" and more plentiful, meaning part-time. The academy, already feeling threatened and defensive, adopts this ideology and begins a segregation process that creates an underclass that is 41% female and growing. The fact that women are structured into part-timer status (p. 102) adds value to departments, but not to the position.

Most of us are part-time in name only; many of us teach more than a standard full-time course load, both in [my] ... Department and in other departments ... the university. We enrich the Department with skills acquired in teaching in other areas, such as the Writing Workshop, Social Sciences and the Humanities. The high volume of teaching [forgoing research time] we do, of course, puts us at a great disadvantage as competitors for full-time appointments. We are in a double-bind position (p. 112).

Alternating between the above, which should be the focus, and what it is like to be a full-time female faculty (p. 99) distracts the reader. As the quote above explains, there is no comparison between being part- and full-time, regardless of gender (p. 102). The fact that tenure-track female academics occupy the lower levels of the full-timers' hierarchy is interesting, but not here. The focus should be on the fact that female part-timers have no voice. As it stands, this chapter is akin to my own experiences with full-time faculty who, on occasion, would explain my good fortune to escape all the mundane and time-consuming aspects of the full-timers life.

Administrators' indifference to job security, unionization, or employee rights for part-timers is also attended to. Administrators' seek flexibility (hiring, office space, infrastructure) and the capricious nature of the part-timers existence acts as a disciplining measure that mutes critical inquiry and encourages politically neutral research (p.195). Administrators' authority permits a casual, utilitarian approach to part-timers that contributes to a hierarchy that is predicated on the devaluation of teaching (p. 192). This attitude is not surprising and one brief quote from a department chair articulates the paucity of reflection and attention involved.

The problem with part-timers as I and others see it, is that they are unconnected to the overall curricular goals of the program as a coherent whole, and they cannot contribute to the research output or governance of the department (p.222).

In this book, Rajagopal fights to politicize the existence of what she calls the "intellectual proletariat" (p. 240). She does so to shift or perhaps create a conversation about the part-timer status that is nested in broader economic realities and, especially, the domination of surplus labour. She explains this by questioning whether splitting academic staff into managers and workers means anything positive alongside the restriction of job access and the acts of supervising and monitoring one's intellectual peers. Collegiality is sacrificed at the alter of meritocratic stratification (a myth, by the way, that some disciplines have spent the better part of a century refuting). Such are the actions of an institution that is uncertain of its place. You cannot read this book and come away with any conclusion other than the fact that the institutional view of part-timers is opaque, capricious, and Byzantine. Every full-timer and administrator should read this book and then confront angry students, their parents *and the parents of part-timers* who, having also read the book, ask pointed questions about the role of ethics and teaching in post-secondary level. Of course, given the book's argument, this is doubtful.

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Robert VanWynsberghe's current research interests in the general area of determinants of health combines education, community engagement, and sustainability. He was a part-time Sociologist (i.e., sessional, instructor, visiting scholar, adjunct professor etc.) for five years after graduation, having taught at least one Sociology course in seven universities and colleges.