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## **‘Not one of the family’: Gender and precarious work in the neoliberal university**

*Gender inequality within the university is well documented but proposals to tackle it tend to focus on the higher ranks, ignoring how it manifests within precarious work.*

*Based on data collected as part of a broader participatory action research project on casual academic labor in Irish higher education, the article focuses on the intersection of precarious work and gender in academia. We argue that precarious female academics are non-citizens of the academy, a status that is reproduced through exploitative gendered practices and evident in formal/legal recognition (staff status, rights and entitlements, pay and valuing of work) as well as in informal dimensions (social and decision-making power). We, therefore, conclude that any attempts to challenge gender inequality in academia must look downward, not upward, to the ranks of the precarious academics.*

**Keywords:** *Academia, precarity, gender, housework, citizenship, work, inequality*

### **Introduction**

Higher education institutions across the globe have undergone significant transformations in recent times. Two issues to receive considerable attention as of late are gender inequality and the precarization of academic labor. Reports and task forces have evidenced the persistence of staggering levels of gender inequality in the higher ranks of the academic workforce and at management level. Gender-based discrimination, including in the form of harassment and sexual violence on campus, regularly hits the headlines. At the same time, activists and scholars in several jurisdictions have highlighted the extensive use of precarious workers to deliver core functions. Yet, the intersection of these issues is rarely addressed. Indeed, most studies of gender in academia focus on career progression and the difficulties for women in securing promotion. Little is known of the gendered dimension of the precarious academic labor

performed by the most vulnerable of the academic ranks. Temporary, short-term workers as well as those who have been pushed out of the sector into unemployment or other types of work are thus excluded from studies purporting to explain the nature of gender discrimination in universities. How are we to truly understand the issue if we focus on the ‘winners’ and ignore the ‘losers’?

Gender discrimination in the ranks of permanent staff is well documented but we have yet to establish the shape it takes in the lower ranks of academia, below the level of full-time lecturer and among the precarious staff performing the ‘housework of the academy’ (Oakley, 1995). Examinations of the gendered nature of casualization are few and far between. Notable exceptions like Diane Reay (2000, 2004) and Ann Oakley (1995) have made articulate cases for the consideration of contract researchers as the ‘lumpen proletariat’ of the academy, likening contract work to housework in how it is undervalued relative to other forms of academic labor. Yet as universities increasingly casualize academic work, the division of labor is more stark and exploitative than Reay or Oakley initially described. As institutional efforts to address gender discrimination focus almost exclusively on promotion to the higher ranks, the need to examine gender and academic precarity is pressing. Our study aims to address what we feel is a highly problematic gap in the literature on gender inequality in academia.

Based on participatory action research that includes a qualitative outreach questionnaire on casual academic labor, we explore the relationship between gender and precarity in Irish higher education. This paper takes inspiration from feminist research on gendered exploitation and work in other sectors. It uses the concept of citizenship and non-citizenship developed by Abbie Bakan and Daiva Stasiulis (1997) to analyze the value of women’s precarious work within the academy and to establish their non-status within the academic family. This framework when applied to our data reveals that

women experience precarity in particularly gendered ways and that precarious academic work is feminized. Women in our study are more likely to perform the most exploited and tenuous forms of precarious work, work that is essential but not valued, paid lower, often comes without benefits or legal protections and in effect blocks chances of accessing secure positions. We argue that these precarious workers are non-citizen workers of the academy and that their non-citizenship status is reproduced through exploitative gendered practices. Non-status is examined through formal and legal recognitions (staff status, rights and entitlements, pay and valuing of work) as well as in the informal domain (social and decision-making power). This non-status acutely reinforces gender inequality not just within academic communities and higher education institutions, but has wider implications for the valuing of women's work as precarity becomes increasingly pervasive and feminized.

These results also question the dominant narrative that gender inequality can be addressed by targeting the top of the sector, without challenging the increasingly hierarchical and exploitative structure of academia. With this in mind, we conclude that further work is needed to truly understand and address gender inequality in academia. This work must look downward rather than upward, to the ranks of casualized, precarious academics where women (and **other disadvantaged groups**) are funneled into precarious, 'dead-end' forms of academic work. Thus, by lifting the veil over a fast-expanding yet invisibilized category of workers, the article encourages a radical rethink of institutional and scholarly approaches to gender inequality in higher education.

The article is structured in five main sections. The first highlights what is said, and not said, about gender inequality and precarious work in higher education in the literature and introduces our theoretical framework. The second section details the methods that were employed. The third section presents our evidence of a gendering of

academic labor in Ireland. The fourth section analyzes our findings through the lens of non-status under five distinct categories. Finally, we examine the implications of non-status for these workers and for women's labor generally.

### **The housework of the academy? Gender inequality and precarious labor in higher education**

In November 2014, Irish universities grabbed international headlines on the issue of gender inequality when the granddaughter of an iconic Irish feminist won a case against the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) for gender discrimination. The Equality Tribunal found that Micheline Sheehy Skeffington had been discriminated against on the basis of her gender when NUIG rejected her application for promotion. This sparked a national conversation about gender inequality within higher education and resulted in a formal review by the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

The evidence of gender stratification in Irish academia is well documented. Statistics recently released by the HEA showed that in 2016, women held 41 per cent of all permanent fulltime academic posts but 61 per cent of academic staff in the 'temporary, part-time' category were women. Further, only 21 per cent of professor positions were held by women. The figure rose slightly to 29 per cent for associate professors and 36 per cent for senior lecturers' positions. At lecturer level, 51 per cent of positions were held by women (HEA, 2016, 2017).<sup>1</sup> Thus, the higher the rank, the lower the proportion of women. This pattern also emerges from studies of gender inequality in higher education in other European countries<sup>2</sup> and beyond.<sup>3</sup> For example, in the neighboring UK, 23 per cent of full-time professorial positions are occupied by women. This raises to 34 per cent for other senior academic positions and 43 per cent for other contract levels: a similar pattern, although less steep than in Ireland (HESA, 2016). This

leads us to ask what this pattern looks like among those workers who are not accounted for in studies of the academic workforce due to their status as doctoral students, hourly paid ‘guest’ lecturers, unemployed, interns, unpaid and other ‘atypical’ forms of academic work, which have proliferated in recent years.

*Gender inequality in academia: looking downward, not upward*

The bulk of recent studies of gender inequality in higher education focus on those holding secure academic positions. Often, the concern is women’s access to professorial or top managerial positions. In Ireland, Coate and Kandiko Howson (2016), Lynch, Grummel and Devine (2012) and O’Connor (2014) have shown that promotion criteria and mechanisms reflect gendered norms, favoring hegemonic masculine behaviors, primarily through excluding those – mostly women – who have had career interruptions. In the Netherlands, van den Brink and Benschop (2012) document how gendered networking practices and the endurance and pervasiveness of the ‘male success model’ ensure that gatekeepers favor recruiting men into professorial positions. Academia is not a hospitable place for women with children (Nikunen, 2014) but single childless women do not necessarily fare better as they are also expected to shoulder the ‘care work’ in their universities but without the support usually afforded mothers (Ramsay and Letherby, 2006). Inequality in treatment is visible from the earliest stages of academic careers. Women are less likely to co-publish with their supervisors or to benefit from meaningful mentorship and career support during their doctoral studies (Baker, 2010). In general, women rarely benefit from the patronage of senior colleagues and therefore do not have access to essential information and support from gatekeepers (Harris, Ravenswood and Myers, 2013). Female academics are typically given the bulk of the teaching and administrative work, which impedes their progress because of the centrality of research

productivity in recruitment and promotion processes (Knights and Richards, 2003).

Women are also less likely to be cited, receive awards, positive student evaluations or glowing reference letters (Boring, Ottoboni and Stark, 2016; Mengel, Sauermann and Zölitz, 2017). **While these forms of gendered discrimination are not new, the ongoing neoliberalization of the sector also poses new challenges to gender equality in higher education. Thus, the renewed emphasis on research productivity and ‘leadership’ further promote masculine embodiments of success and brilliance and hegemonic masculinity as a norm of behavior and governance** (Teelken and Deem, 2013; Morley, 2013).

Universities are not the only organizations governed by gendered norms (Acker, 1990) but these issues are perhaps amplified in academia by a generalized lack of transparency and the persistence of ‘rule-breaking’ behaviors that favor men (Kjeldal, Rindfleish and Sheridan, 2006). Therefore, due to the pervasiveness and multiple facets of gender discrimination in academia, the success of equal opportunity legislation and policies like quotas that are liberal in inspiration remains limited (van den Brink and Benschop, 2012).

Studies conducted by women in senior positions, on other women in senior positions, are limited in what they can tell us about the nature of gender inequality in higher education. It is insufficient to assume that the obstacles that hinder women’s progression through the ranks of academia mirror those for women in the lower ranks. While there is some overlap on issues, these are distinctly amplified for those at the lower end of the hierarchy, in precarious positions. Precarious work brings forth a distinct set of gender issues. In fact, the forms of indirect sexism generated by the spread of neoliberalism in the sector affect women in precarious situations disproportionately, with many struggling even to retain their precarious jobs as a result (Wilson et al., 2010).

The processes of marketization, corporatization and managerialization of Irish higher education have accelerated under the five successive austerity budgets that

followed the economic crisis (Holborow and O’Sullivan, 2018). Depleted state funding, rising student numbers and sector-wide hiring freezes have normalized the reliance on temporary, short-term labor, reinforcing the segmentation of academic labor. Many precarious workers are de facto excluded from career progression mechanisms and are likely to get stuck a ‘hamster wheel of precarity’ with few chances of accessing secure work (Authors, 2015). In the neoliberal university, precarious workers are conceived of as less worthy, less deserving, and stigmatized as those unable to ‘make it’ in their failure to obtain a permanent position. Even research, supposedly the hallmark of a ‘real’ academic, is devalued when embodied by a precarious worker (Reay, 2000).

Furthermore, the division of labor between the principal investigator (often male) and his (often female) contract researchers has entrenched the separation between those who embody cultural capital and those who conduct the invisible and unrewarded labor of knowledge production. It is a distinctively exploitative relationship, in which the contract researcher works to advance the career of the grant-holder while her position is in itself antithetic to the idea of a career (Reay, 2004). Therefore we must ask whether too much optimism has been placed in the promotion of more women into professorial and leadership ranks. Within the casualized, neoliberal university, resistance is difficult and even feminists in positions of leadership may be reliant on the exploited labor of precarious colleagues (Fernández Arrigoitia et al., 2015). A conservative estimate marks the current proportion of non-permanent core teaching university staff in Irish universities at 45 percent (Cush, 2016) but in the current neoliberalizing climate, the process of casualization is likely to continue unabated (Holborow and O’Sullivan, 2018). As universities continue to casualize their workforce, more women accessing the higher ranks does not mean progress for those stuck in contract work.



In this context, the ‘focus on success stories’ (White, 2017) is not productive if we are to understand the character of gender inequality in academia. Working conditions are individualized through the lens of ‘talent’, masking the structural relations that give way to these conditions. Assuming that women who reach positions of power can help others progress through the ranks ignores the power relationships that deeply divide the academic workforce. We have reason to worry that the situation will actually worsen given the rate at which casualization progresses in universities, erecting more and more impassable barriers between the ‘stars’ on the one hand, and the growing numbers of marginalized, invisible workers directly and indirectly exploited by them.

#### *Non-citizens of the academy*

The feminization of precarious work has been well documented (Vosko, 2000; Morini, 2007; Standing, 2011). Scholarship on women’s work in other sectors offers important frameworks for understanding the extent to which gendered precarious working conditions are mimicked within the academic workplace. A seminal contribution to theorizing gender and precarious work is the edited collection by Bakan and Stasiulis (1997) entitled ‘Not one of the family’ on the institutionalization of structural inequalities experienced by foreign domestic workers in Canada. The book examines the dichotomy between citizenship and non-citizenship, literally and figuratively, through the citizenship status of foreign domestic workers whose right to remain in the state is dependent on their live-in status with host families. According to Bakan and Stasiulis, citizenship (and by extension non-citizenship) is a ‘negotiated relationship’ and a nodal point for the intersection of many other social relations as seen through Canada’s foreign domestic worker programme. The foreign domestic worker performs the role of a parent and caregiver, does the cleaning, cooking and laundry, namely work that is integral to the

function of the family. Though this work intimately ties her to the family, she is not seen as a family member and her position in the home is tenuous. Thus, she has no status – not as a citizen of the family or a citizen of the state. She is not one of the family, be that her host family or her host country, Canada. Non-status, as Bakan and Stasiulis reveal, increases levels of exploitation in pay, working and living conditions. Non-status reflects unequal power relations, both formally at decision-making levels and informally in interpersonal relationships. The situation of non-status exacerbates women's oppression, makes them economically dependent and under increased threat of sexual violence, dismissal and deportation (Bakan and Stasiulis, 1997).

While we are examining a much more privileged sector of work, this citizenship/non-citizenship dichotomy is particularly useful to explain the gendered precarious condition within the university. Though this analysis can be extended to include cleaners and caterers, our current work focuses primarily on academics and 'academic citizenship'.

With the casualization of labor, the university institutionalizes and reinforces inequality through citizenship and non-citizenship status. We argue that precarious workers are, in effect, the non-citizen workers of the university (and may also be non-citizens of the state) while permanent academics and managers, by contrast, hold formal citizenship of the university. Similar to the family employing foreign domestic workers, the citizenship and non-citizenship dichotomy in academia reinforces gender, economic and racial inequalities. We argue that women disproportionately perform the most exploitative forms of precarious work and as such share a status similar to that of the domestic workers relative to that of their managers and colleagues in senior permanent positions. They are not the housewives of the academy as Oakley (1995) put it, but its domestic workers whose labor frees up the time of more secure academics to pursue

career goals. As a consequence, the gender inequality they face is very different to that of women in permanent academic positions.

Precarious academic women do not suffer the same degree of exploitation, abuse and vulnerability as foreign domestic workers; indeed many precarious academics are privileged in their educational attainment, personal freedom, cultural capital and class position. Yet we feel the analogy is useful insofar as it illuminates similarities in gendered working conditions, the gendered power relationships that are reproduced across sectors and the stratification within women's work. While precarious academic women may be privileged in terms of educational attainment, this does not shield them from poverty, for example. Forced mobility in search of steady work means many precarious academics are also migrant workers. Irish HEIs are under no obligation to disseminate data on staff ethnicity, nationality or country where staff obtained their academic qualifications (Gibson and Hazelkorn, 2018). Therefore information on the proportion of minority ethnic and migrant workers in Irish universities is not publicly available. We suspect, based on work conducted in the UK (Bhopal, 2015; Gabriel, 2017), that the precarious academic rank is also racialized not unlike foreign domestic work. The analogy also illustrates how structural gender inequality cuts across different sectors of the labor force.

### **The research**

Any study of academic precarity is made difficult by the scarcity of reliable data. A recent report suggested that 45 per cent of those lecturing in Irish universities were employed on a non-permanent basis (Cush, 2016) while this figure is 80 per cent for researchers (Loxley, 2014). Research conducted elsewhere suggests that universities typically withhold (or fail to adequately record) data on precarious workers and that official reports largely underestimate the extent of employment precarity in academia (on

Canada: Brownlee, 2015; on the UK: UCU, 2016). These figures ignore the most vulnerable workers, and in particular the hourly paid, for which no reliable record exists. In addition to hourly paid tutors or lecturers, universities increasingly rely on postdoctoral researchers teaching for no extra pay, individuals enrolled on workfare schemes and other forms of precarious contracts or non-contracts. Our study was originally designed as an outreach questionnaire, aimed to find out more about this fragmented category of workers in order to inform a budding campaign against casualization in Irish higher education, which we co-founded. Both authors relied on precarious academic work including as hourly paid lecturers at number of different institutions for several years in Ireland and elsewhere. As precarious, migrant workers organizing to change our material conditions, we followed the principles of participatory action research. At the core of this approach is a commitment to the production of knowledge by social movements and for social movements; and the use of research to network and build relationships (Fuster Morell, 2009). The research is qualitative in nature as it explores the lived experiences of those who identify as precarious workers. We must also note it was unfunded and not part of our paid precarious academic work.

The main method of data collection was an online questionnaire, which we circulated through professional contacts, social media and with the help of allies in the trade union movement. The questionnaire was accompanied by a note identifying its focus on the casualization of academic work, thus eliciting responses primarily from those self-identifying as casual or precarious workers. The questionnaire was designed to understand the many forms of precarious work found in the sector and its pervasiveness. The questionnaire guaranteed anonymity – which was essential given the climate of fear and uncertainty experienced by most precarious workers, which we became aware of through our organizing activities. Through a mixture of closed and open-ended questions

we asked respondents to inform us of their disciplinary area, gender, age, time spent in the sector, type of contract (if any), earnings and whether they had previous experience of precarious academic work. The open-ended questions invited them to comment on their present situation and their future prospects.

We collected 268 responses, including 181 responses from individuals engaged in academic work and identifying as precarious.<sup>4</sup> Of these, 125 were women and 56 were men. The majority of respondents (78 per cent) worked in the fields of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, namely those assumed to be less inhospitable to women compared to science and engineering (Haas, Koeszegi and Zedlacher, 2016). Most respondents seized this opportunity to tell us their stories, with answers often over several hundred words. Our research initially highlighted a number of elements which indicated that various forms of precarious employment existed across the Irish higher education sector: unpaid internships, hourly paid work and short/very short-term contracts where full-time contracts should have been used. Workers reported providing labor for free; working full-time timetables for well under the minimum wage.<sup>5</sup> For those who reported being in the sector for a number of years, pay and working conditions had deteriorated rather than improved over time. A sense of isolation, anger and despair pervaded many answers; some expressed hope that the unions would support them but many felt despondent in this regard.

We conducted an inductive analysis of the questionnaire and coded answers by gender, type of contract, pay and length of time worked in the sector as well as by hope or hopelessness. Though we did not ask specific questions on citizenship or residency to preserve anonymity, the issue did arise in some responses, especially on the issue of forced mobility.<sup>6</sup> The disparity in work arrangements and the difficulty respondents had to report their pay forced us to create categories that reflected these differences better

than those used in official reports. We stumbled upon difficulties familiar to researchers attempting to paint a picture of precarious work in academia, which makes quantitative approaches unproductive at best (e.g. Wilson et al., 2010). The qualitative nature of our study limits the generalizability of our findings, although these resonate strongly with research conducted in other sectors (Fudge and Owens, 2006). Our findings reveal an array of commonalities amongst precarious academic workers and a striking pattern of gender differences.

### **The gendering of precarious academic labor in Ireland**

There are many forms of non-permanent work in higher education, some more precarious than others. Our research indicates existing categories used to describe precarious positions are not exhaustive. We therefore asked respondents to detail the nature of their work including rates of pay, duration of employment and whether the work was on a full-time or part-time basis. Categorization of this work was a complex task as this exercise revealed there is little standardization across the sector. A temporary but full-time contract, while typically paid less than a permanent contract, comes with a living wage and some short-term stability. On the other hand, part-time contracts are paid less and tend to be shorter. Within this category, hourly paid work is the most exploitative form of paid employment in higher education as the worker is paid, often a meager sum, per contact hour only, with no access to sick leave and other entitlements. Other types of arrangements exist, where for instance the worker has secured a permanent contract but remains employed on a zero-hour basis with fluctuating remuneration. Some respondents were paid by the day, self-employed, or combined several different forms of work. Though both men and women in our sample were more likely to be working in less desirable forms of precarious work, women were especially concentrated in forms of

temporary work that is hourly paid or based on pro-rata and zero hours contracts while men were more likely to be on yearly or multi-year contracts: out of our 125 female respondents on casual contracts, only 27 were on full-time contracts while 20 of our 56 male respondents were. Though based on a relatively small, non-probability sample, these figures suggest that the ‘leaky pipeline’ trend visible in the tenured ranks – where the proportion of women increases as we move from the top categories down to those at the bottom of the hierarchy - may in fact continue if the ranks below are examined.

The length of time spent performing precarious academic labor is also gendered, as women are more likely to have worked in the sector longer than their male counterparts. Women in our study are likely to have spent longer than men in the sector and still be precarious (7.1 years for women on casual contracts compared to 5.7 years for men), reporting a more acute history of sustained precarity. One woman, aged 44, reported working the last 16 years on a series of fixed term contracts while another, aged 53, was still hourly paid after 13 years in the sector. A 53 year-old woman reported feeling ‘insecure and underappreciated’ at still being temporary 18 years on, and another aged 43 has managed to survive by cobbling mixed forms of casual work over the course of 19 years, while a 62 year-old woman worked on an off for ten years before becoming unemployed. Over their years worked in the sector, many of our respondents experienced a downward rather than upward career trajectory. It is significant that more women than men had become ‘stuck’ in forms of work that made them in fact less likely to be considered for better positions.

### *Stepping stone or precarity trap? Gendered hope*

It is sometimes argued that temporary work is a necessary step in an academic career, a stepping stone towards secure employment. Under neoliberal capitalism, both men and

women are affected by precarization, which makes the gendering of precarious work less immediately visible in certain sectors as men may also get stuck in precarious work (Williams, 2013). Yet, in addition to showing that women are more likely to remain stuck in precarious work for longer periods of time, our study indicates that there is a marked gender differences around future expectations and hope. As noted by Fernández Arrigoitia et al. (2015, 85), precarious work is ‘more than an economic set of circumstances: it is a fluctuating, embodied process with both material and emotional states of being’. On the whole, most of our respondents, both men and women, expressed concerns about their future academic career prospects with forced migration and leaving academia as the most common plans to exit precarious academic work. This is consistent with the findings of other studies that have highlighted the significant ‘future-anxiety’ experienced by precarious academics faced with bleak career prospects (e.g. Read and Leathwood, 2018) and the role of anxiety in governing casualized academics in the neoliberalized university (Loveday, 2018). However, degrees of hopelessness are distinguishable between men and women. Men in our study tended to temper their anxiety about precarity, mentioning feelings of uncertainty alongside a hopefulness that precarity was not permanent. Women, however, were more likely to talk of precarity in starker terms and to be more pessimistic about their future prospects, across all ages and stages in their academic lifecycle. A male respondent wrote ‘I try to remain hopeful that I can obtain funding for research for one or two years and then maybe get some more funding and then get a permanent job in a university’ (Male, 34, hourly paid). His emphasis is on securing funding. By contrast, a female respondent working on a part-time contract offset by social welfare speaks instead of survival. She is forced to commute two hours into work and expresses a clear sense of hopelessness and a limited expectation of her career trajectory:



[I] cannot plan ahead. I do not think I will be able to afford to do this type of work, financially or psychologically, and am looking at other options, which are few in this area and in the current climate... I have been looking for additional part-time work to help financially but am already working full-time in practice. We are encouraged to see this work as an opportunity, but in reality know that there is little hope for more than a 9 month, temporary contract. This is unsustainable (Female, 27, part-time pro-rata).

Another woman reports feeling ‘[h]opeless and trapped’ (Female, 43, hourly paid). Yet another, also on hourly pay, stated: ‘If I am to have any prospects at all I need to leave academia’ (Female, 27, hourly paid). This gendered hope is reflective of the reality of working in the neoliberal university where precarious work becomes a permanent trap rather than a temporary phase.

Our data therefore suggests that women are concentrated in the most acute forms of precarious work and more likely to be trapped in precarity for longer periods than their male counterparts. Though our data is not generalizable, it does reveal a distinct set of experiences that suggest the precarious academic condition is gendered and reflective of women’s precarious work in other sectors (Acker, 1990). The implications in terms of women’s life choices, vulnerability to sexual violence in the workplace, increased poverty and insecurity, marginalization, and dependency are discussed below.

### **Not one of the family: Gender, precarity and academic citizenship**

Feminist political economists like Leah Vosko (2000), Joan Acker (1990), Silvia Federici (2004) and Cristina Morini (2007) have demonstrated how women’s labor is typically precarious and thus exploitative. Women, this scholarship has shown, are more likely to perform work that is not only temporary and low paid but without statutory entitlements

or social benefits. The patterns in our data clearly echo the broader established feminist literature on women's work in other sectors of the economy, including sectors which, on the surface, seem far removed from a sector typically perceived as privileged. Citing Epstein (1983), Bakan and Stasiulis (1997, 10) write that 'paid domestic work is not seen as "real" work, nor are the people who do it seen as "real" workers.' These workers are also subjected to fear, surveillance, threat, emotional blackmail (i.e. use of sentiment to extract more labor) and power exercised through intimate interpersonal relations that demarcate the boundary between family citizen and non-citizen. When applying the dichotomy to academic precarity, we suggest, based on our data, that there are five discernible dimensions of non-citizenship status created and policed in academia, namely, non-status as staff member and in decision-making, as well as non-status in social, work, and legal dimensions.

### *Staff non-status*

Precarious workers, in particular the hourly paid and interns, are not treated as part of the staff complement, formally or informally. They are not included in staff headcounts of their host department or the university. As such they do not have staff cards, which means they may not have a university email address, an office or access to university library services. Precarious academics rarely feature on web pages of the academic departments or centers where they work, and are not eligible for conference funding or research support. Lack of workplace supports was noted by a number of our respondents as they indicated this contributed to their sense of being exploited. One woman wrote:

There is a huge imbalance between the continuous service I provide for the institution and the absolute lack of any support/ security provided for me as an employee in return. (Female, 36, hourly paid)

Another woman explains:

It's not just about money. It's about treating hourly paid workers as colleagues, providing support, including them in meetings, treating them with respect  
(Female, 31, hourly paid).

As both argue, precarious employment does not impact only on material conditions but also results in workers being treated less favorably in their daily interactions with colleagues. They are in fact excluded from the staff complement in this sense as well.

### *Decision-making non-status*

The second dimension of non-citizenship is decision-making non-status. Precarious workers are excluded from faculty meetings, meetings with external examiners, and hiring processes; they often have no access to internal mailing lists. As such, they have little input into the organizational structure or culture of their workplace, into curriculum development or research programs and have no say in the decisions that directly affect them, as one hourly paid woman explains:

Frustrated and annoyed - temporary staff are subjected to constant cuts to tutor teaching rates/payment for completing paper work and correcting assignments, overfull class sizes, the minimal remuneration of work, and are underrepresented in staff meetings and in the department more generally (Female, 26, hourly paid).

Casual workers have no control over the work they will be given and typically, like this woman in her late thirties, rely on the benevolence of others to secure what is granted to permanent academics as a matter of course:

My direct boss tries her best to give me other advantages such as training and conference trips. I treat my job as a good internship (Female, 39, part-time pro-rata).

Another hourly paid woman says:

One loses a sense of value of their work and what they are doing. Colleagues do not feel the need to greet you as you do not have a vote at School level, and I could go on (Female, 42, hourly paid).

This reliance on others' informal and formal decisions exacerbates workers' vulnerability. Those precariously employed are denied agency as workers as they are fearful of complaining or voicing an opinion on the organization of their own work: 'we are worried that complaining will impact on our jobs as we do not have security' (Female, 30, temporary pro-rata). Consequently, while women in secure posts have little recourse to appeal decisions, precarious women have even less.

Furthermore, power is diffuse and unlike what scholars of managerialism suggest, operates at all levels. Both university management and academic staff exercise power as they sit on hiring boards, write reference letters for candidates, carry out peer-reviews, create further work opportunities and make localized decisions around pay and working hours at departmental and project level. Dispersion of power means interpersonal relations subtly or explicitly reinforce non-status to the detriment of women.

### *Social non-status*

Thirdly precarious academic workers are affected and marginalized by social non-status. As the domestic worker is not invited to family dinners, precarious workers and hourly paid workers in particular, are not invited to social events like staff dinners or university

receptions. They are not included in conferral ceremonies even when they taught and supervised the graduating students. They are often unknown to their colleagues, unintentionally excluded from informal groups and quickly forgotten if their contract is not renewed. They are denied dignity and value, respect and recognition. As one female respondent says, 'we are liabilities to be gotten rid of as quickly as possible' (Female, 33, full-time temporary).

This dimension of non-status robs the most precarious workers of collegiality, an intellectual community and prohibits their ability to make connections and forge collaborations with those not only in their department but across the university. The social element of academic life enables networking for shared ideas, shared projects, and the acquisition of academic social capital needed to be included in the wider academic community (O'Meara and Stromquist, 2015). Therefore, social non-status further marginalizes the precarious female worker and entrenches her non-citizenship.

#### *Work non-status*

Fourth, is the dimension of work non-status. Precarious workers who teach are typically responsible for the design and delivery of modules and, at times, course design. They pioneer assessment formats, teaching strategies and pedagogical practice but are rarely credited appropriately for such work. In many cases, the university claims intellectual property over all the knowledge work conducted over the course of module delivery. Similarly, contract researchers are typically denied ownership over or credit for their work. Often times, only principal investigators are cited on research projects or on publications arising from the data collected by precarious workers. These workers may not have the right to carry this data forward should they change institutions thus forgoing their right to publish further on the research they conducted. Whether these practices are

enshrined in employment and grant contracts or not, they are pervasive and largely tolerated.

Collectively, these workers are also denied the basic elements integral to academic labor such as the ability to pursue their own research and teaching interests; as well as research leave, career progression and academic freedom. One woman, an hourly paid worker, explains her own situation:

I feel my work is not valued enough, I feel aggrieved and exploited...I know I do the same work as my full-time colleagues, have similar levels of responsibility etc., yet get paid a fraction of a full-time lecturer's salary. There are a number of very important, and time-consuming, tasks that I do for free on behalf of the Department and School, which should be done by permanent members of staff, but either they don't care (lower level of vested interest in attracting students), or are also stretched too far ... All my research I do in my non-existent spare time and without financial support apart from the College travel fund, which means that my typical working week is 60-80 hours...Even so my salary is - with luck, as this year - just about a third of a Postdoc's salary at point 1 of the scale.

Needless to say, I am always under pressure to take on extra work, so I spend the summers touring around the country and attending one conference on a self-financed basis, which I can't really afford, instead of doing research and getting a much-needed break... My chances of getting permanency or even a full-time job at (institution)? Zilch (Female, 43, mixed casual - part-time permanent and hourly paid)

Precarious workers do essentially the same work as other academics but are neither acknowledged nor compensated for much of this work. The denial of such essential elements of 'academic work', defined as encompassing teaching, research and

dissemination, means that the work status of precarious women differs starkly from that of permanent colleagues.

### *Legal non-status*

Finally, academic non-citizens are in a situation of legal non-status as their status under labor law is at best tenuous. Hourly paid workers, in particular, are not entitled to sick leave or maternity leave and are excluded from unfair dismissal protection. The minimum wage act does not protect these workers; neither does the principle of equal pay for equal work. The pay scales applying to their permanent colleagues do not apply to them. As such they have little recourse for complaint under labor legislation and in many cases, trade unions cannot do anything for them. This legal non-status means their position and future work in the host department or university is completely dependent on those with decision-making status. They are consequently subject to subtle and overt exertions of power that are used to punish and discipline them into being compliant, loyal and afraid to look for any benefits, rights or entitlements – which echoes the situation of foreign domestic workers depending on their employers' benevolence as highlighted by Bakan and Stasiulis (1997). These issues were articulated by several of our respondents:

I have never had a sabbatical, and only took [maternity] leave on my third baby. Baby 1 - no leave, afraid I would lose my job, baby 2 worked all my teaching hours in one term before the birth, as I was afraid I would lose my position, only on the third baby was I in a permanent part-time contract and able to take official [maternity] leave... as I am the sole breadwinner, I am afraid to put my head above the parapet (Female, 44, permanent part-time).

Elsewhere in her response, this participant indicated she had been working in higher education for 23 years, always on temporary contracts. At the time of responding, she

was officially part-time while working a full-time timetable. None of her three pregnancies were covered by maternity law. Precarious workers are also denied minimum wage, sick leave or compassionate leave:

Lecturers, tutors and third level educators on these basic minimal contracts are being taken for a ride. We work for less than minimum wage ... We incur none of the basic benefits we should. We can't be sick because we only get paid for when we are present. We don't get maternity leave, compassionate leave or anything else (Female, 30, hourly paid).

### **What does non-status mean for gender equality in academia?**

Firstly, men, primarily, are advancing through the senior ranks of academia as a result of the labor of precarious women. Thanks to the teaching and research of precarious workers doing the housework of the academy, men (and the few women who have made it to the higher ranks) are able to free themselves of the everyday labor and focus solely on that which will secure promotion. This, in effect, makes women the domestic workers of the academy. Women in our survey raised this issue repeatedly. As one respondent argued:

I think it is disgusting. There is such a disjuncture between full-time permanent staff on €80000 or so and they cannot be touched. I do their donkey work ... Very grim. I got saddled with corrections recently by two people on bloated salaries. It hurts being judged by these people who know nothing about my financial struggles and never will (Female, 28, hourly paid).

Another woman explains:



I feel I'm completely being taken advantage of and that the work I do is devalued by the basic contract I'm on. I wait from semester to semester to see if I have hours even though I teach core modules and 70% so assessment rests on my shoulders (Female, 30, hourly paid).

Second, non-citizenship has implications for the feminization of poverty for precarious female academics. Women, as non-citizens of the university, experience poverty, insecurity and economic dependence. Many academic women are in effect part of the working poor. Our respondents repeatedly spoke of their economic insecurity with one woman writing she felt 'underpaid and unappreciated. I currently work 4 jobs to make a living' (Female, 34, hourly paid). Another woman wrote: 'At the moment it's just about enough to pay the bills, but I'm never certain from one semester to the next how much work I'll be able to get' (Female, 29, hourly paid). This economic insecurity speaks to women's wider precarity in their everyday lives; as illustrated by another respondent's account: 'I have sleepless nights trying to figure out how to pay bills; I'm getting into debt and the only option now is to emigrate – again' (Female, 42, hourly paid).

Economic insecurity and poverty, as scholarship on gender and work has shown (Castel, 2000), means that women are financially dependent on their partners, trapped in relationships and situations that makes them vulnerable. This is true of women who are precarious academics too. One of our respondents writes: 'I could not afford to work if my partner did not earn what he does as childcare costs more than my salary' (Female, 39, pro rata). Precarious employment and the succession of temporary contracts also mean repeated experiences of job displacement and unemployment, which translates into significant earning loss over the life course. In addition, the lack of formal legal standing or contract means the university is not required to pay pension contributions for those on the sharp end of precarity, like hourly paid workers. A number of respondents flagged

this is as a concern. Thus, the gendering of precarious employment in higher education contributes to the already existing higher risk of poverty for women in old age.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, while they may be mitigated, in some cases, by the worker's initial class position, the issues facing women performing precarious academic labor are not dissimilar to those faced by their counterparts in other sectors.

Thirdly, interpersonal relationships are a gendered site of struggle.

The status of the most precarious is vulnerable and dependent on the departmental 'family'. Surveillance is a feature of everyday life for precarious academics (Ryan, 2016), as is the pressure to be meticulous and manage one's image as a deserving academic. A woman working on an hourly paid basis says: 'It is like being on the longest job interview ever as I constantly feel I cannot jeopardize my chances should a full-time position emerge' (Female, 44, hourly paid). There is little recourse to complain or resist as both will likely result in not being offered further work; this places many in tenuous living conditions.

A number of our female respondents raised the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace as a concern and this certainly merits further investigation. Though no personal accounts were put forward in responses to our questionnaire, we know from research in the UK (Phipps, 2018) and on other sectors that women who labor in work that is precarious, low paid and exploitative are also more likely to experience sexual harassment and violence in the workplace (Kensbock et al., 2015; Waugh, 2010). Such occurrences have devastating consequences for victims that include severe career disruption and lifelong earning losses (McLaughlin, Uggen and Blackstone, 2017). Furthermore, the work permit and right to remain structure in Ireland for non-EU workers means that migrant women are particularly vulnerable.<sup>8</sup> Not only is their status in the country dependent on their host department or institution but also any move to complain

about working conditions threatens both their future work prospects and their ability to remain living in the state. This too, as we know from other sectors, increases the risk of sexual and other forms of harassment in the workplace (Loyal and Allen, 2006). As already mentioned, women doing hourly paid or unremunerated work have no legal protection against unfair dismissal or other forms of retaliation that may occur should they complain.

Fourthly, women report being forced to delay having children or that being pregnant acted as a barrier to securing steady employment. Two women, both hourly paid:

The guys are all pro-rata. Now I'm pregnant, and they have decided to advertise my position. I have been told I have no entitlement to renewed hours next year. I know I will do the interview with a big bump and receive a "we regret to inform you"... I will be unsuccessful in alleging discrimination as they can just appoint someone with the same qualifications as me. Even if I was successful in taking a case the most I can get is two years wages, which won't keep me going very long, and I will never work there again. It is worth it? (Female, 33, hourly paid).

I am embarking (finally) on having a family. I know this will dramatically restrict my already low chances of getting anywhere soon ... I am worried about how I will survive (Female, 43, mixed casual - part-time permanent and hourly paid).

Finally and in assessment of the above implications, we are left to wonder about the broader implications for structural inequalities based on gender, race and class. While we have no data to speak to this, as with other sectors, we suspect, people of color, people from working-class backgrounds and disabled people are also denied academic citizenship as the gate keepers of the academy serve to ensure it remains a place of

privilege (Brink and Benschop, 2014; Gutierrez y Muhs et al., 2012).<sup>9</sup> Our tacit knowledge gained as migrant workers, organizers of precarious workers and through friendships with fellow migrants indicates that this status added another layer of complexity. Subsequent research is needed on the ways in which precarity is exacerbated by the intersection of structural oppressions.

## **Conclusion**

While most research on gender inequality in higher education focuses on access to the senior ranks and leadership, we take a different, and perhaps contradictory approach to this issue by examining its intersection with precarious labor in the neoliberal university.

It is clear from the testimonies of precarious female academics that their experiences resemble those of women working in other sectors reliant on what Vosko (2000) terms feminized atypical labor. In the university, where men retain their hold on top positions, the feminization and connected devaluation of labor occurs most visibly within the growing ranks of the academic precariat. As non-citizens of the academy, precarious women academics are kept on the margins of their profession and at the sharp end of gender inequality in the university. Under typically poor conditions, they perform necessary labor in the university yet this labor is devalued and often invisible. As non-citizens of the academy, precarious women are subordinated and controlled by webs of power that strip them of respect and recognition in relation to work and legal status, decision-making and social realms. They stand outside the academic family yet this family could not function without their labor. In turn, these working conditions mean increased vulnerability to harassment in the workplace, lack of salary progression, repeated career disruptions, risk of financial dependency. The feminization of academic

precarity thus widens structural inequality and serves to ensure the university remains a site of privilege.

As campaigns like Micheline's Three Conditions<sup>10</sup> gain notoriety and Athena Swan awards are bestowed to encourage gender equality for permanent members of staff, we must ask, what about the domestic workers of the academy? Where do they feature in calls for the promotion of women through the higher academic ranks? Joan Tronto (2002) in her work on 'The Nanny question' asks whether it is possible to claim a feminist victory for women working outside the home when it is done on the backs of other women, women who are marginalized, poor and whose work is devalued. Similarly, we might ask, is the advancement of women through the ranks of academia a pyrrhic feminist victory as their success is almost certainly attained on the backs of exploited women? Indeed, the omission of insecure academic ranks from accounts of gender inequality in academia might be read as further evidence of the non-citizenship status of women who are precarious. As the neoliberal university further casualizes and feminizes certain elements of academic work, the working conditions of women outside the cloak of permanency will no doubt worsen. With this further stratification of the academic workplace, hierarchies rooted in wider social inequalities will only sharpen, regardless of who rises to the top of the academic food chain. Any calls for gender inequality in the university to be addressed must start, we believe, with precarity.

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<sup>1</sup> The reports do not give any indication of the gender of recent hires or the overall gender pay gap as universities do not make these data available, despite being encouraged to do so under the Athena SWAN guidelines (see HEA 2016, pp. 32-33). Unlike UCU in the UK, Irish unions have made little progress in systematically documenting casualization.

<sup>2</sup> Women held 20 percent of full professorships across the EU in 2010, with wide country-to-country variations (EC 2012, 90).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-academia>

<sup>4</sup> Other respondents were permanent members of staff; individuals who were no longer engaged in academic work; or individuals with experience of precarious work who did not identify their current status.

<sup>5</sup> Overall women were paid less than men but the lack of standardization in contracts and terms of pay (hourly, daily rates, unpaid labor) made it impossible to quantify the ‘casual gender pay gap’ in a meaningful way.

<sup>6</sup> Ireland has just seven universities and the academic community small and inter-connected. To ask respondents to speak to their residency status alongside other demographic questions could potentially compromise anonymity, especially those working Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, as invariably these respondents would be familiar to the authors.

<sup>7</sup> While the overall gender pay gap is estimated at 14 per cent in Ireland, the gender pension gap is 37 per cent (EIGE, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> The work permit system in Ireland also means that precarious academics who are migrants face pressure to secure a yearly contract with a minimum salary of €30,000, not an easy feat when the pernicious use of teaching fellowships with salaries as low as €20,000 – and hourly paid work which may add up to less than half this amount - are increasingly commonplace.

<sup>9</sup> As already mentioned, there is no publicly available data on the minority or migrant status of academic workers in Ireland. Research in the UK has shown that non-nationals are concentrated in the lower ranks and that racism limits their chances of securing permanent positions (Cantwell and Lee, 2010; Gabriel, 2017; Khattab and Fenton, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> The campaign arising from the case brought by Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington against NUIG.