History of Housewives in First-Year Composition and Effects on Students, Pay, and Pedagogy

Vera Lynn Lentini

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History of Housewives in First-Year Composition and 
Effects on Students, Pay, and Pedagogy /

by

Vera Lynn Lentini

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Thesis Committee:

Thesis Sponsor: Dr. Melinda Knight

Committee Member: Dr. Jessica Restaino

Committee Member: Dr. Emiliy Isaacs
Abstract

This thesis paper reviews the history of women in the field of composition as a discipline, paying particular attention to the evolution of the role of the writing instructor. Today, first-year composition classrooms are staffed by a mostly contingent and female workforce, which is an ethical problem for writing programs and English departments. As in the larger workforce, service-oriented careers like teaching tend to be underpaid and characterized by deference to the experts, who are in the position of authority. While this scheme seems to have functioned for housewives and breadwinners in the 1950s, in today’s dual-earner couple it is unsustainable to perpetuate a pay structure that mirrors what housewives in the 1950s typically earned, at about 25% pay and part-time. Additionally, this thesis paper explores the implications of outcomes for the first-year composition course including recommendations for change, and implications for future generations of continuing with this gendered past.

*Keywords*: colleges and universities, first-year composition, composition as a discipline, education, contingent labor, women, gender roles, equal pay, feminism, writing pedagogy, students, teaching
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A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts

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VERA LYNN LENTINI
Montclair State University
Montclair, NJ
2016
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History of Housewives in First-Year Composition and Effects on Students, Pay, and Pedagogy

The role of writing instructor in a university carries as much cultural coding as the role of engineer in a Fortune 500 company. Studies have shown the variety of different professions — lawyer, doctor, professor, nurse, teacher — accompany a variety of pay scales, levels of skill, and professionalism. All the professions, however, are not created equal. In today’s university, we encourage every student to pursue the career that they desire, no matter what that is. The reality, however, is different. Each role carries a history of cultural coding and opportunity is not always equal for each student in the field in which they decide to study.

In particular, the role of college writing instructor is interesting because, as composition scholars agree, the first-year composition course has the opportunity to address these and other twenty-first century problems with the students who attend the first year of college. Since first-year composition is a required course, the writing instructor has a unique position as role model and ambassador for the university system and the larger professional world. Unfortunately, however, many students do not receive the benefit of having a full-time tenure-line professor, and they are usually, as research and first-person accounts have documented, under the tutelage of an overworked and underpaid contingent faculty member, except in universities where doctoral programs supply most of the labor for writing programs.

The writing instructor’s position is at the core of a problematic duality. While writing instructors are ostensibly teaching students how to think critically, they themselves are often subject to institutional influences that cause them to shy away from
taking risks in the classroom, or promoting the very kind of thinking the class advertises as foundational skills in desired outcomes. Looking at the institution more closely, we find that when attempting to identify the stakeholders in this situation, it is a too-simple conclusion to say that if the administration, for instance, stopped cutting costs, then we might have better writing instruction for the next generation. Research shows that there is a relationship between pay and learning, but it is more complicated than cause and effect. A better approach towards improving pay and working conditions focuses on the ethical implications of paying people so poorly. The role of writing instructor is in fact, according to what I have found in the research, mired in a history of segregated roles for men and women that dates back to the 1950s, and is difficult to unpack and dismantle. Even more challenging is the current economic climate where state budget funding of university programs is much less than it used to be due in part to corporations parking profits outside of the state taxation system.

In the current larger debate about equal pay it is easy to overlook entrenched economic factors in our history. After all, first and second-wave feminism heralded equality and the power to earn. Universities, the keepers of cultural coding and socializers of the next generation, advertise liberal ideals of equal opportunity. Yet it is a commonly cited “fact” that women today earn 77 cents to a man’s dollar, partially because of pay disparities within professions, but also because of pay differences between professions men and women are likely to choose for themselves. The example of the underpaid female writing instructor contributes to the continuation of these social codes.
To understand what second-wave feminism did, it is useful in this research to start with the history of women as housewives before feminism and recount the history of women in their various states of liberation, divorce law reform, and career-making through the years. This should help us explore to what extent our gendered past as a culture informs the decisions students make in choosing their careers. This gendered history informs the role of writing instructor, and can help explore why the majority of instructors are still female and employed on a contingent basis (including, now, male ad hoc professors). Despite advances in the field of composition studies, a relatively new field, the history of the role remains relevant, and professions are not necessarily equal for students to choose, largely because of the cultural codes that the writing instructors themselves continue to communicate (perhaps inadvertently) in their classrooms simply through the example of their presence.

Writing instructors are uniquely positioned to give students valuable insight into a university system that many agree is struggling with massive sweeping changes at almost every level. Students today are more diverse in learning needs, education levels, technology literacy, place of origin, native language, etc. than ever before. The first-year composition course could be a cornerstone of what might remain relevant as a strong liberal arts background and an important source of revenue for the university. Yet the teachers of this course — as numerous accounts, records and studies have shown — are often lacking in the support they need to be “real” professionals, even though some could even be considered expert in their field by most standards. This thesis paper aims to explore to what extent this lack of support, low pay, and professional isolation have to do with the history of women in the role of writing instructor (since women have historically
been assigned to more nurturing roles and “feminized” professions), and what implications there might be for student outcomes.

I have organized this thesis into three chapters. The first chapter outlines the history of female support since 1950 and explains how female readers were helping male English professors by grading papers for minimal remuneration. It explores how cultural codes inform careers, and recounts of how the field of composition studies established itself in the 1980s, and how the feminized practice of teaching writing became a microcosm of the professions in general since the separation of composition as a discipline in the 1980s. Feminist theory from the 1970s through the 1990s helps explain the ways in which women were creating new roles for themselves, and materialist feminism in particular provides a framework for understanding the current sexual division of labor, and why pay differentials continue to persist.

The second chapter reports on the current situation, the role of adjunct and how the historical sexual division of labor perpetuates an unethical labor situation in first-year composition instruction. It reports on wages for women historically across fields, while exploring how economic factors, specifically the unpaid work women do at home, influence what they are capable of earning in the workplace. Because they are so tied up in terms of hours and energy, women are less likely to be engaged professionally in their field, which is why publishing has been the domain of full-time tenure-line (mostly male) professors rather than contingent workers. Paradoxically, considering their experience in the classroom, it is the writing instructors themselves who have the most potentially valuable contributions to make to the field. All of these factors result in professional
isolation and overwork, which are indicators of a labor situation that has become and remains extremely unethical.

The third chapter is a discussion exploring implications for outcomes in first-year composition and suggestions for future approaches, including statements from professional organizations on the status of contingent labor. Why does it seem so difficult to move past the gendered approach to writing instruction even after all of the changes women have experienced professionally and the gains that composition studies has made as a discipline? Some considerations include how poorly-staffed classrooms might contribute to the continuation of this labor problem because of the representation of gender roles. As the history shows, the labor problem may have more to do with the nature of women in the field than is currently recognized.

Chapter 1: A History of Low Paid Female Support in the University

Just a few decades ago, the ability to command Standard English was reserved for “men in the professions and their wives” (Faigley, 1992, p. 152). It may perhaps come as a surprise to discover that today we are actually not so far away from this history. The wives of yesteryear actually set the course for what has come to be known as the position of composition instructor; and today, first-year composition courses are still staffed by a mostly female workforce. The Associated Departments of English (ADE) reported in 2008 that the majority (67%) of part-time faculty in English departments was made up of women (Bartholomae et al., 2008). Furthermore, these instructors are employed on a part-time contingent basis and do not receive benefits or salary. While this may have been a feasible plan for housewives in the 1950s, how feasible is this pay structure for individuals in 2016?
Without taking issue with people who truly feel called to a life of service, I propose a not completely radical idea that the desire to serve is culturally inculcated in women. The choice of what profession to enter, and the associated pay grade, has been influenced by cultural codes for the genders over the years; yet the relationship and causes are a bit tricky to locate. Holbrook (1991) considered the situation, and remarked

The question of why women enter low-status fields, such as English teaching, rather than strike out for more prestigious careers is not easy to answer. The notion that women “choose” their occupations needs to be accompanied by awareness of what conditions a woman’s choice in a given context. . . men tend to opt for the unsupportive departments with higher status rewards, whereas women tend to opt for the supportive departments with lower status rewards. (p. 213)

Although the pay situation is more complicated than this, Holbrook pointed out how cultural codes carried by the female gender tend to keep women choosing helping roles, while men are opting for the more prestigious careers. It is not an easy question to address, and the rest of this chapter should present findings from historical research on how in the profession of composition instruction and writing program administration these roles are based on history of feminized professions and continue today because of the cultural codes that influence women’s professional and educational choices.

**Maternal Pedagogy.** Since at least 1950, women have been emerging as part of an educated labor class in many fields. Today, many women have ambitions as individuals and equal partners in dual-earner marriages. Women began their working careers in contingent and paraprofessional roles because of conflicting responsibilities at home and because they lacked ambition for full-time positions (also a lack of day care
and maternity leave). The discipline of writing instruction became feminized as women entered the workforce. Schell, Ritter and others frame the issue in terms of an “ethic of care” and gendered educational ideals (Ritter, 2012). Women could “help” by being of service to writing departments and taking on the work of teaching the “great unwashed.” They could get out of the house and feel they were doing important work of service to society. As time went on, it became women’s ongoing role to do the service-oriented work of the profession, and these roles still persist even after the massive culture-shifting movements of equal rights and feminism.

Though not all writing instructors are female, the labor of writing instruction has come to be associated with feminine ideals such as having less ambition, maintaining things as they are, and self-sacrifice. Since 1950, writing programs have saved on expenses by employing a labor force that is willing to work for little pay and sees its service as part of a duty to society. Wycoff (1958) explained the pragmatism introduced with the layreader program, originally aimed at housewives to save on costs.

A large pool of... readers is available among better upper-class English majors, graduate assistants, and housewives who majored in English as undergraduate or graduate students. By a Machiavellian calculation, one teacher and one reader could do the equivalent of two teachers’ work at a 25% saving in dollars, since readers could be engaged at the lowest possible rate; they, too, have no union. (p. 79)

English departments discovered that they could save time and money by employing housewives who would work for marginal pay. Further illustrating this move to cut costs and save time is an advertisement (Jewitt, 1965) for the layreader pilot program that reads
"PERHAPS CONSCIENTIOUS ENGLISH teachers will be able to regain their lost weekends after all! ...there are thousands of educated housewives who would be willing to take part... and trained to serve as lay readers... the readers will use a ‘key’ prepared by a group of experts” (p. 510). The housewives in this advertisement are “willing” to participate in helping the English teachers read papers and as a result, the teachers gain more free time. Accounts of the layreader program, however, are not entirely positive. One record (Logan, 1963) compares English helpers to physicians assistants and the working conditions to a sweatshop. (p. 211-12). While this comparison might be a bit extreme to relate to life after the equal rights movement of the 1960s and the rise of feminism, it does indicate a not so distant past where the dominant culture was such that male authority figures did the “real” work of the profession and women were helpers who administered the particulars. The women were paid according to their contributions, which were lowly compared to the contributions of the men who did the “real” work of the profession. Their pay was proportionately low, despite long hours and self-sacrifice. Helpers typically made 25% of what the professionals they were serving made in terms of pay.

**First-Wave Feminism.** During the 1970s universities underwent major changes, and some trends that started during that time continue today. The realities included a tanking economy and state cuts to higher education, as well as an increasing demand for a college education and a more diverse student body including older men and women who were moving to the workforce, veterans, immigrants, and other part-timers (Miller, 2015). Because numbers of students were hard to predict on a given semester, administration turned to contingent faculty to fill the gaps (Miller, 2015). In the
meantime, second-wave feminism was in full swing, and more and more women were rejecting the submissive housewife identity and divorcing their husbands because of reforms in divorce law. Women were starting to imagine themselves as individuals with reproductive rights, liberated from their husbands and traditional roles. This created some tension as women were seeking new philosophies about their purpose and pursuing careers apart from their families and roles as housewives.

Women were finding roles in the professions and in the universities, although many strove to keep up the traditional image of a “good” woman while doing it. French philosopher and feminist Irigaray (1977) explained that it is women’s responsibility to maintain the social order without intervening to change it (p. 812). To what extent does this resonate with what a “good” writing instructor does? It is the instructor’s job to help students grow into citizens capable of expressing arguments through writing about complex issues, while completing administrative paperwork, responding to student writing, and conferencing. If a “good” writing instructor does all of these things, then we must have a few “bad” ones. We have instructors maintaining the social order without intervening to change it, despite the many feminist scholars who worked to change the language we use to talk about pedagogy. However there are complications with language and signifiers about gender in the context of discourse or even as part of the conversation of professional life.

The problems Irigaray pointed out relate to psychoanalysis, economics, and signs and signifiers including a discussion of Lacan’s work in her (1977) chapter “Cosi Fan Tutti.” Irigaray focuses on language and discourse, noting that since they are the means that men function in a world of men, the signifiers cannot make relations between sexes
because they were set up and determined though language whose laws have been “prescribed by male subjects for centuries” (p. 87). What results is that women are in a position of exclusion from all discourse, and man continues to seek them out because women are flaws, faults, and lacks in his discourse (p. 89). Similarly women in the 1970s and 1980s practically speaking were attempting to create new discourses in the professions, including composition studies.

So second-wave feminism attempted (and still attempts, because perhaps we can call it “unfinished business”) to redesign the hierarchy, and “break the bonds” as in Hairston’s (1985) speech to the College Composition Conference. Hairston addressed composition instructors, urging them to pay attention to their inner selves, their own values and voices. She said, “we must no longer try to be ‘good’ by trying to live up to someone else’s vision for us by saying, ‘Tell me what you want me to be and I’ll be it. I want to please you.’ If we do that, when we win, we lose” (p. 278). Since then, compositionists have given shape to their values in practice and in theory, making progress defining rhetoric and composition as legitimate scholarly work. Yet feminist discourse has inherent structural problems because it operates in a world where it technically cannot exist because of its “other” status outside of the male realm of logic and official discourse. Despite the gains of composition as a discipline in the 1980s, for the majority of instructors, being disruptive does not come with a pay raise. As a composition instructor in today’s labor situation, being disruptive can get you dismissed.

If we return to the “ethic of care” issue, we find that feminized discourse is devalued systemically and automatically also, and perhaps most importantly, because of its link with motherhood. Despite feminist attempts to revise hierarchy, there is the issue
of which gender is mostly responsible for parenthood in our culture. Composition theory relies on feminist structures. Caywood (1987), Annas (1987) and Stanger (1987) explore how composition pedagogy is similar in its form with feminist theory. While these theories helped the field gain and create feminist spaces, they are part of the situation of the chronic undervaluation of the work of composition instructors. Daeumer and Runzo (1987) explained how the undervaluation has to do with motherhood (and the female gender). “Mothers socialize young children to insure that they become acceptable citizens, and teachers’ work, like the work of mothers, is usually devalued” (p. 45-6). Composition pedagogies oftentimes take a similar form. For instance the process model, because it facilitates the fullest expression of the individual voice, parallels with the feminist re-visioning of hierarchy where marginalized voices find space. This illustrates how composition pedagogy is feminized. The material circumstances of instructors however remain the same as women continue to maintain the social order accepting an undervalued pay structure and serving the expert, despite feminist projects of revision.

Irigaray (1977) also discussed the issue of motherhood. In that the “other” (woman) is the repository for all unconscious non discourse, she is also the repository for the male subject’s signifiers, in that she “serves as matrix/womb” (p. 101). Irigaray re-states the psychoanalytic theory that “anatomy is introduced here in the form of the necessary production of the child” (p. 102), which reaffirms women’s place as producers and keepers of children. In a later chapter entitled “Women on the Market” Irigaray unpacks Marx’s analysis of commodities as the elementary form of capitalist wealth concluding that women are objects of use-value measured against the male system of exchange in patriarchal societies, particularly for their use in reproducing male subjects
as producers of labor. As such, women in history have been exploited as a class of producers. They underwrite the symbolic order “without any compensation in kind going to them for that ‘work.’” (p. 173). Compensation would imply a “shattering of the monopolization of the proper name (and of what it signifies as appropriative power) by father-men” (p. 173). Thus nature continues to be subject and inferior to “labor” and the “productive” forces of society. Women are mirrors of value for the men and are exchanged as such in this scheme. Putting Irigaray’s work in perspective, as a seminal work of second-wave feminism, we can draw parallels to the way women were taking new roles in society during the 1970s and 1980s, and her theories about women on the market provide a relevant theoretical framework as we continue reviewing the history of women’s work being systemically undervalued in the household and in professional life, even as women were establishing themselves in public life years ago and continue to break away from the patriarchal scheme today.

Composition as a Discipline. When Hairston made her (1985) chair’s speech to the College Composition Conference 30 years ago, she urged instructors to “break the bonds” that bound them to the English department, and some instructors did just that. McLeod wrote in response 20 years later (2006) that she had hoped the discipline would grow to offer a writing major and a more robust research agenda, yet the gains seemed small compared to the dreams of the future that she and her colleagues had in the 1980s. She explained how Hairston’s analogy to the undervalued wife who must decide to leave home felt so relevant to her professional life in 1985 — the literature faculty members in her department were male, and the composition faculty members were female. She likened the breaking of composition studies from English departments to a failed
marriage. "We grew apart, our interests were different, we did all the hard work and they didn’t appreciate us" (p. 527). As the field of composition studies grew, people noticed a new breed of faculty and administration that was challenging the deeply held cultural beliefs that writing instruction was only a service-oriented enterprise. Composition studies formed its own literature, pedagogy and scholarly discourse. In 20 years, there grew to be 65 doctoral programs, more professional journals, and former administrators becoming department chairs or deans (McLeod, p. 529). Yet even though composition studies found some independence from the English department, little changed economically for the "helpers." In some ways, writing programs operate as if it were still 1950, as evidenced by the accounts of tutors and adjuncts. Many writing programs became separate from the English departments, but not necessarily on equal terms, and instructors of first-year composition remained mostly female (Bartholomae et al., 2008).

Since composition began to form its own discourse as a discipline, women have made up the majority of attendees at conferences and held the majority of seats on the professional boards. In the 1980s, the majority of the members of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) College Section were women, as well as over half of the participants at annual meetings of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) (Holbrook, 1991). This illustrates how composition has become feminized as it has grown over the years. There is no shortage of writing classes to teach. Yet women never made it fully into the ranks of tenured professorships and remained teaching first-year composition. Even though the number of students in first-year composition has increased, there are still even fewer tenure-line positions available each year, leaving contingent instructors to teach multiple sections of writing, and leaving
them in a perpetual state of overwork. The optimism of composition becoming a true discipline in the 1980s has been tempered by the actual gains that women and contingent laborers serving in first-year composition have (and have not) made since then.

**Feminism in the 1990s.** The transformation of composition studies to an esteemed profession has been part of a larger process of revising cultural codes carried historically in roles for women in society. Holbrook (1991) called this the "breaking down of the sexual division of labor" (p. 211). Yet, changing the status of "feminized" roles is a complex endeavor both economically and culturally speaking. Many women were teaching because they really cared about their students, and it gave them a sense of purpose. They were entering public life in what felt like a meaningful way. Yet because teaching is enmeshed in the feminized habit of helping others, as a result it remained a female profession and characteristically lower in pay and esteem than the male professions. Women in the 1990s were filling tenure-line positions just as those positions were starting to disappear.

Since the 1990s little attention has been paid to gender, pay, and pedagogy because the movement of composition as a discipline and women becoming professors gave way to more pressing issues of economic sustainability and changes in higher education. In the 1990s however, we begin to see a lasting change in the way composition scholarship discusses diversity. During that time, feminism was working to empower marginalized students in relation to the dominant discourse; and this movement included work from Cooper, Annas, Juncker and Flynn. For example Flynn in recent work (2003) wrote about composition instruction from a feminist position explaining how "composition specialists replace the figure of the authoritative father with an image
of a nurturing mother” (p. 550). Because of social and psychological development, men and women have different conceptions of the self, specifically because of the early bond to the mother in households with typical gender roles. As a result, women tend to define what is moral in terms of conflicting responsibilities rather than the masculine view of morality based on competing rights (p. 553). These gendered differences manifest themselves in student writing, where female students tend to create “connected knowing” with no reference to discord (p. 555), and male students tend to write narratives of achievement and sacrifice to achieve a goal (p. 557). Flynn’s observations of the differences between genders exemplified also the differences between men and women who work as scholars. Typically, male scholars attack another’s argument to assert their own position, whereas female scholars tend to create connections among ideas, rather than inserting themselves or disagreeing.

To what extent might these moves tend to re-inscribe traditional gender differences rather than move beyond them? Feminism in the 1990s attempted to disrupt the culture of what women could and could not do in the university and in their careers. Women entered higher education in record numbers, and more obtained terminal degrees than ever before. Feminist composition theory that shows up often during this time focuses on the interconnected nature of the classroom, feminist modes of writing, and various types of instruction that claim the feminine to be powerful in shaping the student’s viewpoint on the world through writing. However, the disruption has made an impact, but maybe not in the way that feminists would have envisioned.

Cultural Codes and Careers. In modern history, women have tended to hold certain types of professional roles, and these examples are subtly passed down through
generations. In the larger workforce, permanent positions are more difficult for women to attain despite gains made by proponents of equal pay for equal work. In the university system, men are more likely to hold permanent tenured positions while women are more likely to hold supportive roles. Enos (1996) reported that for men in academia the average time spent getting tenure was 5.7 years for men and 6.9 years for women (p. 95). Holbrook (1991) also reported a similar phenomenon in that 70% of men were in senior ranks, and 64% of women were in junior ranks. Men have tended to fill professional roles while women fill the auxiliary roles, illustrating a phenomenon that has been part of the academic system for generations. This history of low paid female support and lack of tenure opportunity informs the pay situation for composition instructors in the academic system, and ultimately reinforces traditional gender roles.

This matters because it is a symptom of a family problem that influences careers. In *Do Babies Matter?* Mason, Wolfinger & Goulden explore the family sacrifices women make to get ahead in academia and how gender and family interact to affect promotion to full professor, salaries, and tenure. This family problem would not matter if family time were compensated, valued, or just not expected as a default for women as it was in the 1950s. However, today we live in a world where women believe they can be or do anything, and while this is somewhat possible since first and second-wave feminism revolutionized roles for women outside of the household, women are still playing the role of caretaker in the home, in the workplace, and in academia. The fact that women make family sacrifices and how that influences careers deserves more attention in the current debate over why women choose certain paths over others, and why they are generally
paid less; and it is particularly relevant to our study of women in composition since the role of reader was originally a role for housewives.

Cultural codes informing roles for women are deeply embedded in our psyche. The dominant culture defines a woman’s place as standing next to her man. In fact, the etymology of the word “woman,” according to Hawkesworth (1988), depends on the part of the word “man.” In English, the word is derived from “wife,” and in French, femme means both woman and wife (p. 458). Culturally and linguistically speaking, if the etymology of the word woman in our language depends on the man, then it follows that the spaces she occupies would be contingent on the man. In this way, it is not surprising to find that contingent instructors today struggle economically on an individual level, since the role was originally derived from a place where the writing instructors were dependent on tenured professional men who were breadwinners in their traditional households.

Zeroing in on women in first-year composition, we find some interesting trends. The female gender apparently carries these cultural codes onto the academic profession, including full professorship. Gubar (2013) notices an interesting parallel between the shrinking availability of tenure-line positions available and the arrival of women into the field of English literature. In 1972, fewer than 6% of the English faculty in her university were women, and as time went on, for every 3-4 male professors who retired, 1-2 male or female assistant professors were hired (Grubar, 2013). This resulted in more work and larger class sizes. While these changes were happening, the work of teaching writing became associated more and more with women’s work. Interestingly enough, the integration of women into the profession arrived at the same time that departments began
to scale back on funding. Is this simply coincidence? Or is the work less funded because it became women’s work, and therefore less valued? Perhaps the university in its search to cut costs, began first with the people who would feel more comfortable being paid less.

What implications might there be for students who are taught by overworked mostly female professors? Among shrinking department sizes from the 1980s onward, Gubar notes that the challenge for English departments is in preserving a unique mode of inquiry that future citizens need in order to think critically about the world. Writing programs and English departments seem to be the places on campus that can hold onto this important tradition, yet these departments are facing almost insurmountable challenges. Gubar’s anecdotal illustrates the mood of departments facing the challenges of maintaining academic rigor in the midst of sweeping changes. It seems strange that a mode of inquiry with thousands of years of history is to fall from the university priorities, especially when considering the future, digital literacy, and the transition to twenty-first century technology-equipped classrooms. It seems too much of a coincidence that women would feminize and as a result devalue a field that was previously considered so foundational, especially in light of the history of professional roles for women and the cultural codes carried even in the etymology of the word woman. In this way, gender and societal norms might influence the types of roles that students ultimately pursue.

Considering all of recorded history, teaching only recently became the domain of women (only in the last 100 years), whereas the making of knowledge has been men’s work. Holbrook (1991) explained what defined and continues to define “women’s work” in general terms including work that is service-oriented, dominated by women, and devalued in terms of pay. Jobs for women have typically been related to helping,
nurturing or serving others. In academia, positions that a majority of female workers
generally fill are more likely to be paraprofessional in nature, rather than fully
jobs including registered nurses, airline attendants, child-care workers, dental hygienists,
hairstylists, school monitors, waiters, health service and librarians (p. 218) belonged to
almost a full two-thirds (75%) of the women who were in the workforce.

These facts illustrate the landscape of the professions in recent history; and
keeping these in mind can help us discuss the adjunct problem, since the role grew out of
a teaching position that was originally filled almost exclusively by women. The adjunct
situation has become an unethical working situation. Chell (1982) described the life of a
part-time faculty member, saying that “most of us have employed husbands and therefore
can better afford exploitation. At least we have insurance. Perhaps most of us are more
used to being exploited, can stand up under it better, rationalize it longer, maybe enjoy
it?” (p. 38), illustrating the cultural code of being a supported and supportive woman
while also bringing to mind the ethical problems of being part of this newly emerged and
exploited labor force, as we will see in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: How Sexual Division of Labor Creates an Unethical Labor Situation

The university has a labor problem. The Association of Departments of English
(ADE) in 2008 reported that contingent workers taught 81% of sections; this includes
teaching assistants, part-time, or full-time non tenure-line faculty (Bartholomae et al., p.
44, 2008). This reliance on underpaid instructors impacts the field; and the history of low
paid female support can help discuss how adjuncts are paid so poorly. Recent
scholarship, though often times outlining the obvious ethics problem, could pay more
attention to the historical connection between pay and gender. Noticing how the history ties into the pay situation might help address the deeper, systemic issues behind the labor problem universities face. It could also help us look for new connections between gender, pay, and pedagogy that could have implications for outcomes in first-year composition.

The Current Situation. In the first chapter, we saw how the role of writing instructor grew out of an antiquated role for women as layreaders in the 1950s. While this may have been a feasible plan for women in the 1950s, it is not a feasible plan for today’s individual. In general, women who worked in the 1950s and 1960s earned marginal pay. Even at that, it was not the majority of women who took part in the workforce, at fewer than 30% (Labor, 2006) of women participating in the workforce. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census’s Consumer Income report, median income for men was $4,100, while women’s incomes averaged $1,300 (1961) —about one-quarter of men’s earnings. Layreaders and women in general earned much less than their male breadwinner counterparts.

Out of the 30% of women who participated in the workforce, only 28% of those women worked full-time, and they made about two-thirds of what a full-time employed man would make, at $3,300 (Labor, 2006). Even though this income disparity is not much more than today’s often quoted statistic of women earning 77 cents for every dollar a man earns, it is important to remember that the majority of women (about 70%) did not work at all, and out of the women who did work, only a minority worked full-time, which was about 10% of all women were working full-time in the 1960s (Labor, 2006). Compare that to today, where family units with average earners usually require two incomes for a livable income. So a full two-thirds of all women in 1960 did not work at
all, and the average, or median money income for families in 1960 was $5,600 (Labor, 2006), which is slightly more than the average living wage today adjusted for inflation and cost of living. The statistic of 77 cents to the dollar is more than what an adjunct makes compared to a tenured professor today, and what an adjunct makes is considered below living wage.

Before I calculate the cost of living in the 1950s and 1960s versus today, and the associated ramifications of a role historically designed for a dependent person now evolving into a role occupied by a sole provider for a family unit (of either gender), I want to again highlight the fact that the majority of women who worked in 1960 held part-time positions and were making one-third of the income that men made (Labor, 2006). So women in the 1950s and 1960s were earning marginal pay, at about 25% the rate, because they were working half the hours at almost half the rate. This contributed to the ongoing stereotype of the writing instructor “helping” the male tenured professors, and continues to be a labor problem since adjuncts are paid so little.

In the reader program in the 1950s, women were inhabiting helping roles at 25% the rate of pay. However, after the equal rights movement and the development of composition as a discipline, the role of layreader evolved into writing instructor and adjunct/contingent, yet failed to completely grow into an equal role where pay would be equal. The hours became full-time, yet often adjuncts piece together part-time appointments at various institutions. The writing instructor remains a supportive role filled with women, and the systemic pay disparity never fully equalized. So going back to my original point, while inhabiting an auxiliary role might have been feasible for the small percentage of women who were working in the 1950s, it is not a feasible plan for
individuals or members of dual-earner couples today. Yet the actual people who inhabit these writing instructor roles today are much more diverse than housewives of professional men in the 1950s. Writing instructors now include male and female (although women still do outnumber men), transpeople, and sole providers/breadwinners/heads of household (who are living hovering on or around the poverty level, by the way). So today, the actual people inhabiting these roles are contributing to partnerships or providing for families, but the role has not grown enough for this kind of job to be really feasible for supporting a family on a practical level. With the way that the university is changing today as a result of state budget cuts and changes in student populations, it might not make sense to continue creating more full-time tenure-line positions. However, the ethical problems of keeping people in antiquated and underpaid positions are far-reaching. There are people whose positions and pay are not changing with the times, as help for the university; and people are still willing to work so there is no shortage of workers on the market.

Controlling for inflation, the cost of living in 1950 was less than the cost of living today, and single earner households were the norm. According to the MIT living wage calculator (Glasmeier & Farrigan, 2013) it is more feasible today to support two children with two adults working. In the 1950s (Labor, 2006), the cost of goods after adjusting for inflation was less so the cost of living was less. So then, with the MIT living wage calculator, the living wage is estimated on the low side because it misses life expenses (like college, retirement, life insurance and final expenses) and estimates the bare minimum for survival. This corresponds with the breadwinning family of 4 with one earner of the 1950s. So even the living wage for one-earner families has jumped since the
cost of living has increased; so then it follows that composition instructors are even
further behind in terms of wages, historically, since the pay is barely commensurate with
what a housewife might make in the 1950s.

Since the equal rights movements of the 1960s and the rise of feminism, as a
culture we can now can imagine and expect that women are able to be independent and
liberated. We as compositionists have formed our own discipline and made immense
professional achievements, interacting professionally with colleagues, male and female,
expert and layperson. Yet the history of housewives continues to be connected with the
current adjunct situation at a basic level. Today, there are over one million contingent
instructors in the United States, making up over half of all faculty (Miller, 2015). Another
20% are full-time without tenure and only 30% are traditional tenure (Miller, 2015).
About 80% of tenured faculty are not in faculty unions (Schwartz, 2014), indicating a
lack of solidarity among levels of faculty at the university. Some universities like Rutgers
University actually do have a strong union that includes both tenured faculty and adjunct
faculty, but that is not the norm. This lack of solidarity contributes to the field’s
perception as having a lack of focus, and reinforces its feminization and marginal status.

When considering recent stories of adjuncts and unions, it is necessary to define
terms. Miller’s (2015) list includes part-time, contingent, non tenure-line, casual, adjunct,
non standard, peripheral, external, ad hoc, limited contract, new model, occasional, and
sessional. Just this list alone helps unpack what this role has evolved into since 1950, and
for the purposes of this discussion, I might use “adjunct” or “contingent” but I could also
use any of the above and the reader would likely understand to what I am referring.
Non tenure-line instructors face enormous stress because of their contingent status. One adjunct talks about the psychological and physical pressures associated with working as a casual employee. She says, "I don’t think people understand how oppressive it is to work without job security, to work on a terminal, sometimes ten-week basis, without knowing you’ll be employed. It wears on you... not only are you underpaid, there’s absolutely no respect. Over time, that hurts. It just hurts" (Miller, 2015, p. 46). It was recently found that non tenure-line faculty also face systemic workplace bullying. Lester (2013) reports data showing how tenure status makes a difference in faculty members’ experience of being exposed to bullying behaviors, indicating that non tenure-line faculty is likely to face aggression in the work environment as a direct relation to their role as contingent.

The stress, bullying, and marginal status of non tenure-line faculty is obviously an ethical issue. But to what extent is this systemic bullying, stress, and low pay exactly related to being a woman composition instructor? After all, 33% of part-time faculty in English departments are now men (Bartholomae et al., 2008). Well, it is clear that the current situation involves a large number of adjuncts, most of whom are women, who continue to provide services for the tasks of grading papers and teaching the lower levels that men have historically avoided and women have volunteered for. Are women in general more likely to face workplace aggression? To what extent is a field’s marginal status defined by the gender of its members?

**Wages for Women.** Returning to the cultural coding issue, there is a connection between how much women are paid and what professions they choose. Although the university is the site of gross wage imbalances for instructors, it is not the only profession
where wage gaps exist, although it is perhaps the most severe. The effects of the wage gap in general are far-reaching. According to a recent study by the Center for American Progress Action Fund, a woman earns on average about 500,000 dollars less than her male counterpart in her working lifetime (Arons, 2008). According to that same study, women with college degrees earn proportionately even less at about 700,000 compared to women who did not finish high school at 270,000. This further illustrates the “men and their wives” phenomenon of educated housewives volunteering or working for marginal pay at the service of their husbands. These numbers indicate a pervasive sliding scale for women; the more they earn, the greater the gap between her and her male counterpart, and the more money she is losing over a working lifetime.

The wage gap exists partly because women historically choose lower-paying professions, or are siphoned into the lower-paying ranks where they defer to the experts. The sexual division of labor results in differing wages for professional and paraprofessional roles. This is the case for composition instructors, who work many hours for what in some cases amounts to less than minimum wage. Composition scholarship over the last 30 years has focused on this gap and offered insight into how the pay structure for contingent faculty is connected with the gendered nature of the role of writing instructor (Annas, 1987; Caywood & Overing, 1987; Stanger, 1987; Holbrook, 1991; Enos, 1996; McLeod, 2006; Ritter, 2012; Lester, 2013). For comparison, other similar roles include paralegal (lawyer), nurse (doctor) and secretary (business manager).

A representative example of the reader (professor) role, female academic McLeod (2006), reflects on her professional life in the 1980s, when the other literature faculty in her department was nearly all male and the composition faculty was female. The roles
were so clearly defined by gender that one of the faculty members insisted on referring to the composition teachers as "the housewives" (p. 526); and as we know, housewives contribute their hours to housework, yet are not remunerated monetarily for their service, just as composition instructors are not remunerated fully for theirs. This joke served as a perverse and literal reminder of the attitude pervading literature departments in the 1980s (and even still today) that the literature people did the real work of the profession, and the compositionists were the help.

It was this moment of what we might call workplace harassment that illuminated the gendered nature of composition instruction for McLeod, and even 30 years later can help explain why, despite significant advancements in composition scholarship, the field has struggled to fully establish itself in terms of pay and reputation. In this history we discover the cultural codes that are intertwined with issues of pay, pedagogy, and ultimately could affect student outcomes. Meanwhile, enrollment in college and university programs has steadily trended upward as more Americans of every socioeconomic background are seeking degrees as prerequisite for entry-level jobs in almost every sector. Add to the list more female students are continuing their educations to higher levels than ever before, yet they are being hired at disproportionately lower rates, and still experiencing a lifetime wage gap. Thus the history of low paid female support continues.

In many liberal arts colleges, first-year composition is a required course because it develops critical thinking and writing skills. Additionally, current scholars are even calling for digital literacy as a necessary skill for participation in the working world, adding onto the list of skills and outcomes tasked with this underfunded course. Ideally, it
should be part of a university core curriculum that empowers students to become critical writers and thinkers (Tsui, 2002) capable of creating civic discourse in a digital age. However, instructors may find themselves lacking the resources to carry out such lofty aims. As Restaino (2012) points out, many composition classes are taught by instructors who are “largely untrained, unsure of their responsibilities, and equipped with a syllabus that they did not design and perhaps a list of pedagogical procedures they do not understand” (p. 1). So how can composition instructors empower students to engage in civic discourse when they themselves are not part of the larger conversation? Or if they are part, their contribution is marginal and contingent on the professionals who do the “real” work.

Since the current gender-pay issue is informed by women’s history, arguments for equal pay might benefit from considering how the history of women informs the current pay situation for adjuncts and women in the larger workforce. The history may have been obvious to radical feminists who worked in the 1960s to change everyday language that would later come to be known as sexist — language pervading law, school, and everyday life. However, feminists of the twenty-first century, and people interested in garnering support for the humanities or better working conditions for contingent instructors, could re-visit the connection between pay and gender because it is so intertwined with the labor situation in higher education. The cultural idea of what wage a woman is capable of earning is a central part of our history in the university and in the larger workforce. And these wages are directly related to the role that women inhabited (and still do) inside the American home and family.
Division of Household Labor. To understand the material circumstances of women in composition and the workplace in general, we can take a look at the economics of the household. I am not the first person in the current debate to cite division of household labor as an influencing factor in wages and the roles women fill outside of the home. Notably, Sandberg (2013) recommends that in order for women to break the glass ceiling, men must be “more empowered at home” (p. 108). She considers the unequal division of household labor, reporting that when a husband and wife both are employed full-time, the mother does 40% more childcare and about 30% more housework than the father. These alarming statistics show how conflicting responsibilities at work and at home tend to pull women’s energies away from the job. The assumption is that if men were equal partners at home, then women would be more involved in their careers. Not a bad place to start.

Yet the numbers continue to show this tendency for women to do more of the household work, resulting in more total hours worked globally and less wages in total. We have already established the close tie between composition instructor and housewife, mostly because in the early days, compositionists were exclusively female housewives, and more recently they are still paid like volunteers and even referred to as housewives by male faculty. If we compare the role of composition instructor to either breadwinner (full-time wage-earner or equal member of a dual-earning couple) or housewife, it is definitely a closer fit — economically speaking — with the housewife role. So the professors who casually referred to writing instructors as the “housewives” actually had a reason to make that comparison, even though it is a sexist move and comments like that are grounds for harassment charges.
Even though the composition instructor often has more total work time than a full-time worker, his or her earnings actually amount to less than what a full-time employed married wage-earner (male or female) makes. In the late 1990s, one instructor calculated her hourly rate as $3 an hour after factoring in all of the time reading and grading papers (Schell, 1998, p. 1). Is this an ethical wage for a writing instructor? A woman? A professional? Perhaps a volunteer? In the traditional scheme, housewives do not get paid for their labor, yet composition instructors are closer on the pay scale to housewives and much lower on the pay scale than a full-time wage-earner making a full salary, even when that wage earner is female earning 77 cents to the dollar. How is this pay scale affecting the material circumstances of instructors and the level of respect they can command in the classroom? What does this communicate to students about the things women can (or cannot) achieve?

The economist Becker explored some implications of housework on earnings in his (1985) article about human capital and the sexual division of labor. This economic study dated 30 years prior to our current situation provides a relevant underpinning for our study of the material circumstances composition instructors. Becker studied time-budgets of married men and women's contributions to work and housework, and made economic models for effort. He found evidence suggesting that "the earnings of men and women would not be equal even if their participation [in the workplace] were equal," and this proves to be relevant in our current debate where advocates argue for equal pay for equal work. Becker cited the main reason for this income disparity as responsibility for household activities, where both working and non working women complete the most, i.e. "responsibility for child care, food preparation, and other household activities," which
“prevents the earnings of women from rising more rapidly” (p. S35). He predicted that occupational segregation would decrease in the future if men were to take on more housework, which actually has happened since then but not significantly enough to completely close the pay gap for men and women doing the same jobs, and has not influenced the working roles that women choose for themselves significantly enough to change the economic status of teaching roles in general, since those fields have become so irreversibly feminized. As we explored earlier, even teaching pedagogy associates itself with ideas of nurturing and feminist discourse that contributes to the field’s ongoing feminization.

Perhaps women are just a weaker sex, have less energy in general, and are more suited to housework chores? Perhaps the link of teaching with motherhood is a natural and necessary one? Hersch and Stratton (1997) found evidence that supports Becker’s assumption that men and women have equal amounts of capital to expend (lest the reader take the argument on that women are inferior creatures biologically and may have less human capital to begin with). They found that

Although the primacy of household responsibilities in determining gender differences in labor market outcomes is universally recognized, there has been little investigation of the direct effect of housework on wages. Using data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, cross-sectional wage regressions reveal a substantial negative relation between wages and housework for wives, which persists in specifications controlling for individual fixed effects. The evidence for husbands is inconclusive. Married women's housework time is, on average, three times that of married men's. The addition of housework time to the wage
equations increases the explained component of the gender wage gap from 27-30 percent to 38 percent. (p. 285)

The findings from Becker’s (1985) and Hersch and Stratton’s (1997) studies clearly underpin current statistics Sandberg reported where “only 9 percent of people in dual-earner marriages said that they shared housework” (p. 106). And the completion of this housework directly lowers total wages received. Illustrating the household division of labor are findings from 1975-76 where an employed full-time married woman worked a total of 63.2 hours whereas an employed full time married man worked a total of 60.0 hours, 12.1 of those hours being work at home compared to 24.6 hours of married women’s work being at home (Becker, 1985). Becker concluded, “as a result, married women have lower hourly earnings than married men with the same market human capital, and they economize on the energy expended on market work by seeking less demanding jobs” (p. S35). From a human capital perspective Becker’s study assumed that men and women have equal amounts of human capital to begin with, so it makes sense that women expending more at home have less to give at work. Part of a woman’s work at home is the caring of children, which has come to be more closely associated with teaching and by extension, college writing instruction.

Even Sandberg would have admitted that women are not necessarily superheroes with more energy, even though working women often wear many hats and are generally responsible for more total labor hours than men are, when you factor in childcare, eldercare, housework and general other/emotional support/chef/psychologist/personal shopper, etc. etc. The ethics of this situation of unequal division of labor at home influencing work, and what professions women choose make the situation even more
complicated; however, as these reports have shown, the sexual division of labor perpetuates a larger labor problem where women are not compensated. In the teaching of composition, the division of labor contributes to the adjunct problem and possibly affects the kind of instruction students receive. Furthermore, the ramifications of one gender having more time to engage fully in academic work leads to a gap between who has the time to read, write, publish and generally contribute to their field and who does not, which as we shall see has far-reaching ethical implications for instructors and students as well.

**Publish or Perish.** The specialized making of knowledge has historically been the domain of full-time tenured professors. This is a problem because it denies contingent instructors, who now teach the majority of classes, ownership of the pedagogical tools they use on a daily basis. Potentially, contingent instructors could make valuable contributions to the academic conversation currently dominated by peer-reviewed journals, boards, committees and other things for which they simply do not have time. In 1985, submissions to *College English* were a majority from male authors at 65%, and the acceptance rate for men was higher than women (Holbrook, 1991). In the last 30 years, more women have entered the field, but contingent workers are still less likely to publish. The publishing of textbooks has also been, historically, the domain of male professors except for more recent developments from Diana Hacker, Nancy Sommers, and others. In Weaver’s 1986 college composition textbook, male authors formed the majority at 62% (Holbrook, 1991), whereas more women tended to publish workbooks, instructional advice, and materials at the developmental level. The heavy workload combined with lack of credentials makes it difficult for adjuncts to navigate the world of publishing. It is
counterintuitive that the actual practice of teaching writing for the most part goes undocumented, since the instructors are actually doing the work of the profession on a day-to-day basis. It would be valuable to have more first-hand accounts of how pedagogy works. However, personal experiences often go unrecognized because contingents are not “expert” enough, even though they may have years of experience.

Many instructors lack the time and support to connect what they are doing to theories in published composition scholarship that have been established by the experts (Jacobsohn, 2001). But is it a missed opportunity to brush aside their contributions? In the changing landscape of higher education today, the student’s voice matters more than ever, since students are becoming more and more fitting into the model of consumers buying the product of higher education. This radical shift from the “ivy tower” model to an open university might benefit from a more robust dialogue among tenure-line faculty, administration, and contingent instructors (Jacobsohn, 2001). However, because of the continued demands on instructors’ time, we are perhaps missing foundational parts of this dialogue. Contingent faculty simply do not have time to publish in the way tenured professors do. The way the division of publishing labor persists re-creates an unethical situation where instructors may not be reaching their potential and students may not be getting the best education for their dollar.

The ability to publish is related to pay, gender, and cultural coding. Historically, it is rooted in the way specialized knowledge has been more characteristic of masculine professions (Holbrook, 1991), whereas communicating knowledge has been more characteristic of feminine professions. For example, in business management, Gomez-Mejia and Balkin (1992) found that the primary determining factor of faculty pay is the
number of top-tier journal publications that a faculty member has authored. How would it affect an ad hoc instructor’s career to be published in a top-tier journal? Is that even a possibility? Other factors such as teaching performance only affect pay for faculty members who already have exceptional research records (Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992). The ability to publish is related to tenure status, and pay is directly linked to that. What follows is that leisure time is directly linked to publishing, and the completion of housework reduces leisure time. Being an overworked overscheduled contingent instructor also reduces leisure time. Teaching performance is just peripherally related to pay (Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992). In composition, teaching continues to be feminized and associated with service rather than publishing. It holds an elementary place as “women’s work,” and as long as it continues to align itself with school teaching and education, it will likely continue to be considered work of lesser value.

The transformation of composition to an esteemed profession can only happen, according to Holbrook (1991), as part of a larger complex process of “raising the status of teaching itself and the other service occupations in a capitalist society” (p. 211). Traditionally publishing has been the indication of high status in the society of the university and market for research. But perhaps there are other ways to raise the status of teaching in a capitalist society. Such a plan would involve putting a monetary value on a woman’s time. Labor that was typically done at home or in “sweatshop” conditions would have to be valued, economically, equal to the work that a woman’s male counterpart was doing in the office or university, publishing his theories and debating with other men. Becker (1985) documented the actual hours that wives were putting in; valuing those hours according to real consumable output might be the next step if we were
to continue asking questions about how to value properly a contingent laborer’s hours in accordance with acceptable ethics. A major disconnect occurs when we value the experts’ contributions differently than we value the instructors’ who are doing the majority of the work.

**Professional Isolation.** Penrose (2012) found that contingent instructors see themselves as “teaching outside their profession” (p. 114). Because of their distance from the professional community, they are less likely to see themselves as contributing members, and therefore have difficulty sustaining an image of themselves as expert. Penrose also found that in professional organizations, members are credentialed based on expertise. This was predicated by a history of professionals in every field — health, law, etc. — organizing themselves and contributing actively to a community’s body of knowledge as professionals. Penrose’s findings outlined an important dynamic in the development of the modern professions, and the difficulty that composition studies has experienced finding its professional identity.

Penrose framed the issue beyond the problems of job security, and explained how the identities of teachers as professionals inform the challenges we face with contingent labor in higher education. Penrose referred to this “tradition of professional isolation in higher education” (p. 111) furthermore as contributing to a “lack of coherence in student learning.” Both of these points illustrate the way that contingent labor is (a) not working and also (b) how it might be affecting student learning. These self-images are integral to the way professionals behave and how their students subsequently learn. Further on the point of lack of coherence in student learning, it was reported that “different worldviews lead to concrete differences in course content and methods” (p. 113). Since this is the
case, it might benefit the profession and students if teachers were more organized in terms of their professional development, but this is often not the case because conferences are expensive and demand time. In this way, the feminized image of the writing instructor continues on, despite being a position that could relate to students and garner and develop insights and pedagogy relative to them. This would help the university realize its goals of conceptualizing the student as customer and writing programs and pedagogy reaching the goal of a real student-centered approach. Instead, this disconnect furthers the distance between the instructor and the student, the student and the academy, and the instructor and the academy.

Individual instructors who have been teaching for years have problems when their own personal professional methods come into contact with the directives of the “experts.” Penrose (2012) explains that since contingent instructors consume pedagogy rather than form it themselves through the traditional routes of publishing and professional participation, there is often times a disconnect between what contingent instructors are forced to consume as “professional development” and what they have found to be effective through their own practice in the classroom. Otherwise known as the division between theory and practice, this phenomenon puts contingents in a position where they may easily interpret professional development as a “euphemism for brainwashing or remediation” (p. 116), leaving an experienced faculty member’s autonomy and professional identity in a state of challenge. The intention of professional development is to “regulate and regularize” the activities of instructors, and can be effective in doing so for less experienced members, however at a certain moment in a composition instructor’s career, these ongoing professional development mandates can directly challenge the
instructor's own sense of self-possession and authority that they may have been developing on their own through the activities trial and error in their own classrooms.

Would there be value in finding a method to place importance on these experiences? How can we value the experiences of workers in the field when standards are already established? The problem is that so many of these workers might not be meeting outcomes for student learning, even if they deserve to be fairly compensated and treated like human beings, and even if that compensation might help them become better instructors. Clearly, there is a tension here, and professional identities are caught in the balance. Penrose even reported direct experiences of teachers feeling “guilty” when forced to implement procedures that were in direct conflict with their own beliefs about teaching. Student outcomes, teacher methods, and professional support are clearly out of alignment in for writing instructors in first-year composition.

Penrose (2012) explained how, as others have noted in *College English*’s 2011 special issue on contingent faculty, the everyday work of contingent instructors prohibits participation in professional exchanges including conferences, publishing, serving on committees, and even interacting with other faculty members socially. For the few who do manage to attend conferences, their participation often goes unacknowledged (Bilia, 2011). This is a gross injustice for the people doing the real work of the profession; not only is it unethical, but it also contributes to upholding a system that just is not working on so many levels.

We have now reviewed how the work a woman does at home as per the traditional female roles of housewife and breadwinner affects workplace participation. In composition studies, women have entered the field but the majority find themselves
relegated to contingent ad hoc positions, outside of the conversation, merely re-teaching what the experts deem as important. The wages for women historically have not matched the wages for men, and the 25% rate of pay for housewives in the 1950s serving as layreaders never fully equalized as the profession grew into composition as a discipline. Added to that is the lifetime wage gap that women face in general and the cultural coding that encourages women to enter certain fields of lower prestige over others. Since the women’s rights movement and feminism, we as a culture expect women to be treated fairly as equals. However, even in the first-year composition classroom, arguably one of the more critical training grounds for future citizens, women are represented as marginal, unimportant, underpaid, and overworked. This is an ethical problem not only because of the labor problem, but also because of what implications there might be for outcomes in first-year composition in terms of the kinds of learning environments in which students are engaged.

Chapter 3: Implications and Outcomes for First-Year Composition

It is difficult to show cause and effect to illustrate exactly what is going on in first-year composition although it is clear that there is a link between pay and gender. This gendered history of exploitative labor is wrapped up in a discussion of economics that is beyond the scope of this paper. However, we can stand back and after reviewing this history start asking some questions. What are the implications for outcomes in first-year composition of the continuation of this gendered history? What are the ethical and pedagogical implications of continuing to use these resources?

As we have seen, the reliance on underpaid instructors impacts the field in various ways including who contributes to discussions of pedagogy and professional life and who
does not have the agency, time, or resources to do so. Often times it is the composition instructors themselves lacking in job security or leisure time who have the most potentially valuable contributions to make, and yet they continue to face barriers to participation. This is an ethical problem because it shortchanges the students of potentially valuable improvements to their learning, the instructors because of lack of support, and the university because its writing programs are not as strong as they potentially could be. Added to that is the fact that these ad hoc instructors are teaching a course they did not design and are paid commensurate to what a housewife working part-time might make in the 1950s.

These systemic issues behind the labor problem have to do with the history of women in first-year composition. We have seen how the relegation of women to childcare and household tasks directly affects participation in the workforce at large, and we have seen how historically women in composition have been referred to as “the housewives” and “the help” whilst experiencing bullying, relegation to small or shared office spaces, exclusion from departmental meetings, and a general lack of support, professional development, and a living wage. All of this persists despite the gains over sexism in the 1960s, the establishment of composition as a discipline in the 1980s, and the creation of exciting new spaces for women as tenured professionals in the 1990s even as those positions were beginning to disappear.

When considering the implications of this labor situation, we can pose some questions to guide further research. To what extent does an underpaid workforce add to the challenges writing programs and English departments already face with an increasingly diverse, growing and changing student body? Is having a poorly paid and (in
most cases) not well-trained labor force teaching first-year composition enough for providing suitable instruction? Is this situation the kind of place where students feel safe to try new points of view and think critically about the issues? How can composition instructors realize lofty pedagogical aims like fostering a sense of plurality or upending power structures when they find themselves on the lowest rung of the totem pole? Finally, to what extent do role models play in the types of opinions, career aspirations, and risk-taking behaviors that students automatically and unconsciously assume in writing classrooms that inform their future career choices?

I realize these are big questions. In recent years, various organizations have attempted to address publically this growing and persistent labor problem with some statements and proclamations designed to take an official stance on the situation and provide strategies for remedy. These statements are predicated on what was the first, the Wyoming Resolution, which came from the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) 1986 conference in Laramie. Some discussion on that has followed (Robertson, Crowley, & Lentricchia, 1987; Gunner, 1993; McDonald & Schell, 2011; Doe & Palmquist, 2013) notably titles such as "Why the Wyoming Resolution Had to Be Emasculated" (Sledd, 1991) and "Unfinished Business: Coming to Terms with the Wyoming Resolution" (Turman, 1991) which illustrate the tension as more resolutions continue to be made in the years after 1986. The CCCC passed the "Resolution on Professional Standards for Instruction" (2003), which resolved to provide writing teachers benefits and salaries equal to tenure-line faculty. Currently, the CCCC has established the Committee on Part-time, Adjunct, or Contingent Labor which reports twice a year and surveys contingent employees about their needs and identifies campuses
in needs of improvement while pursuing alliances with professional organizations that also have a stake in issues of contingent labor. These resolutions are continuing a dialogue that seems to be going on now for 30 years with little tangible results.

Current committees are addressing concrete ways in which individuals can interact with institutions and organizations. The MLA Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession currently meets through 2019 to consider issues surrounding the contingent labor problem including salary and benefits, workplace issues, governance, academic freedom, and professional development. In 2011, the committee released some recommendations and evaluative questions for employment practices. These included hiring and assessment, compensation and professional advancement, rights and responsibilities, recognition, and integration into the life of the department and institution. The recommendations also provided some guiding questions. Do non tenure-line faculty members attend department meetings? Are non tenure-line faculty members at your institution eligible for awards, honors, and recognitions? Are all non tenure-line faculty members evaluated using the same assessment instruments and standards? Do non tenure-line faculty members have health, retirement, and other employment benefits? (MLA, 2011). These are keen questions for casual employees to be asking themselves and their institutions. Even more encouraging are the gains that some writing programs have seen with and without the involvement of unions to negotiate things like three-year contracts, benefits packages, and higher per-course remuneration. These gains ameliorate the situation although it seems however that the number of tenure-line positions is not likely to be growing any time in the near future.
In 2010, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) held a working group and issued a statement calling for more long-term security of employment for instructors outside of the tenure system, since specialization outside of tenure lines is so common. The group called for change at the local level while leading the official position that is endorsed by the NCTE. This kind of statement sidesteps the tenure problem and instead calls for long-term security based on the following conditions of employment: fair working conditions including timely appointments and security for faculty members who have served for three or more years, fair compensation including a salary that reflects work time outside of the classroom and includes support comparable to tenure-line faculty, involvement in shared governance which includes participation in faculty meetings and communication in the department, and finally respect and recognition which includes access to professional development activities and support for scholarly work. These recommendations sound great, but the problem with statements is that they are really only words, and as much of a plan of action they may call for, these proclamations alone have not been enough to radically change working conditions for the majority of adjuncts.

There are perhaps some other approaches. Peckham & Hammer (2011) made a report that suggested building non adversarial positions between instructors and administrators might be a better way of working together to provide improved writing instruction and address exploitive labor practices (p. A11). They summarized a recent convention in Louisville in 2010 of the Committee on Part-Time, Adjunct, or Contingent Labor reporting a debate about the accreditation process and how it might be used to encourage good labor practices through rewards (p. A9). The committee also proposed
funding of projects including research of administrative hierarchy to find pain points relative to the writing programs and working conditions of writing teachers, research finding links between quality of writing instruction and reliance on underpaid instructors, and research of student attitudes toward writing instruction from part-time versus full-time faculty. These strategies are addressing how the situation is just not working on so many levels, and even more research can be done along these lines to explore why the material circumstances of the majority of instructors who are teaching first-year composition are still so poor despite 30 years of attempt at reform.

What these resolutions are calling for is, generally speaking, a raise of esteem for the teachers of writing. Yet why is it so difficult to change the material circumstances of adjuncts? Why so much institutional resistance? To return a moment to Holbrook's (1991) idea about “raising the status of teaching itself and the other service occupations in a capitalist society” (p. 211), we can imagine that raising the status of service occupations would necessitate a huge revolutionary massive cultural shift akin in scope to the women’s rights movements of the 1960s. A change of the (unconscious and unspoken) cultural codes for the genders at the heart of our society has the potential to address the status of the service occupations in society, and by extension raise the status of habitually undervalued professions like the teaching of writing, thus addressing our pervasive and ethically problematic labor problem. Yet to what extent are first-year composition instructors inevitably perpetuating these stereotypes by maintaining the status quo? What would it mean to even talk about gender roles in official statements from professional organizations? Would it be merely re-visiting the past, politically incorrect, or passé to talk about gender roles alongside labor reform?
In capitalist society where labor is traded for money, labor in the household (laundry, childbirth, childcare, cooking, cleaning) is still unpaid and undervalued. So perhaps a revisiting of beliefs about the way households function is in order. The labor in this scheme would need to be conceptualized as valuable, and by extension women in undervalued fields would need to have their contributions valued as well because “women’s work” could be considered valuable in a real and economic way instead of underwriting the production of labor as per Irigaray’s materialist feminist theory. The women in writing programs who are teaching first-year composition for what amounts to in some cases less than $3 an hour would need to have their roles reconsidered in terms of value to society. Valuing things like student outcomes, the building of a pluralistic society, teaching students how to think critically, and all those lofty aims of the liberal university core curriculum would need a boost along with the labors of the housewives, maids, cleaners, dental hygienists, teachers, secretaries, and all the feminized professions. If all labor is to be valued, even motherhood and the taking care of children (of which teaching has become an extension) could be valued. At the same time, valuing different occupational choices for students through successful modeling of women in various un-feminized professions might create change.

Yet our gains so far have seemed so minimal in the face of such blatant injustice. The field of composition, through all of its growing pains, has accomplished a lot. Feminist pedagogy in particular has made lasting impacts in the ways students are taught, or at least on how we conceive students as being taught and set out for them to be taught with standards, pedagogies, and outcomes statements. In particular, pedagogies encouraging multiple viewpoints, the exploration of power structures, and student
opinions are at the center of what we consider foundational pedagogy for the teaching of first-year composition. But what works in theory might disconnect with the actual practice of teaching writing in real classrooms, with the particular challenges of space, time, numbers of students, and other practical considerations. As a result of the every day realities that instructors who are underpaid and undertrained face, to what extent then do composition instructors end up reinforcing the dominant hegemonies of power? What are the implications for outcomes coming from this split between the ratified discourse and the practical situation? Are we too idealistic in the ivy tower? Are we too mired in grading papers in the classroom? Or are we too burned out to notice anymore?

**Conclusion.** In the beginning of this thesis, I speculated that pay and student outcomes were linked in some way, and dove into a history that could explain the economic situation and ethical problems with the contingent writing instructor position. However, I have not found extremely strong links between student outcomes and the marginal status of writing instructors. For sure, pay affects student learning somehow, but I think the strength of this history is in showing the gendered nature of the role of writing instructor, from which point further research could be done to show the relationship between, for example, gender and pedagogy, or perhaps pay and pedagogy. As evidenced by many accounts, students feel shortchanged by not having an available or well-supported instructor, but the data suggesting a direct link are inconclusive.

Instead, focusing on the link between gender and pay allows us to take the discussion of the resolutions of the MLA, NCTE, and CCCC a step further. It allows us to perhaps insert a line of thought about gender equality into the current line of thought that solely (and rightly) focuses on the simple fact that adjuncts are paid very little and
tries to make specific proclamations and recommendations designed to remedy it. When we look closely, we see calls to negotiate what we have discovered are items directly related to the gendered and feminized nature of the space i.e. no benefits (a previous reliance on a husband’s benefits package), small shared office spaces (an indication of marginal status), little participation in faculty and departmental meetings (previously the domain of male tenured professors), a small stipend (an outgrowth of a previous nominal fee system for housewives), and a lack of professional development (in a world where specialized knowledge-making is for men).

If we could connect these tangible issues that people are working to address locally and globally on the yearly committees to what composition values as a field (disruptive pedagogies and the like), then perhaps we have a starting point for discussion. Until then, the writing instructor role is likely to remain feminized and we will not really know if the students are suffering because we have no other experience with which to compare. If only full-time professors taught first-year writing then we might have a control group with which to compare. Or perhaps a study could be done where differing levels of supported faculty (well compensated vs. poorly compensated, with benefits vs. without, with tools for professional development vs. marginalized status) were compared against each other and student outcomes were measured. A difficult and complicated task indeed, but a potentially fruitful area for further research if we are attempting to find new ways to address this growing labor problem that remains a source of tension, disconnect, and massive ethical problems in writing programs and English departments.
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