

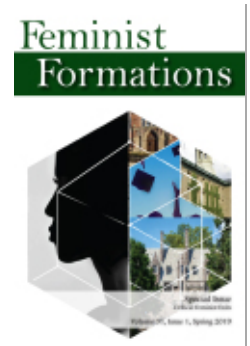


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Feminist Formations, Volume 31, Issue 1, Spring 2019, pp. 20-44 (Article)



Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2019.0007>

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“Every Breath You Take”: The University Crisis as Normalized Feminist Exclusion

Meghan Krausch

This article draws on personal experience with stalking to argue that crises of stability in higher education and institutional problems of hostile workplaces for women, gender-nonconforming, and transgender people are linked issues that work simultaneously to create conditions that push critical feminists out of the academy. Critical feminism as an intellectual and political tradition attracts scholars from marginalized groups, but our personal and scholarly locations combine to place us in more marginal positions within the academy. Critical feminists are more likely to be in teaching intensive positions that are more likely to be cut or threatened; we are more likely to do more emotional labor as a result of these same jobs and, often, our personal attachment to them; we are more susceptible to harassment from students, colleagues, and the outside public as a result of our work; and we are subject to less institutional protection for the same reasons. These factors all contribute to critical feminist exhaustion, and an inability to produce scholarship that would allow us to move on rather than out. This phenomenon has serious consequences not only for our presence in the academy but also for the type of knowledge that is produced as a result.

Keywords: academy / critical feminist exhaustion / gender / gender-based violence / gender nonconforming / heterosexism / institutions / neoliberal university / queer faculty

Just as with other supposedly neutral policies or disasters, university crises have disproportionate effects. Those of us who are critical feminist scholars, especially those who both do the work and embody it, are hit harder, as are nonfeminist faculty of color, disabled faculty, faculty from the two-thirds world,¹ and other

similarly marginalized groups. I, for example, have found myself mired in chaos the entire four years at my tenure-track job. While these successive disasters cannot be exclusively attributed to my status as a critical feminist scholar or to my embodiment of genderqueerness, they are not separable either.

The year of my arrival, the university was finishing a multiyear round of “program prioritization.” While my tenure home program of sociology was safe for the moment, the gender studies minor I was hired to support was one of the at-risk programs. I arrived, therefore, in the midst of a fight to prove the value of gender studies. In my second year, one of my fellow sociologists accepted an early retirement offer as part of the university’s ongoing efforts to solve its manufactured budget crisis, reducing our program from three full-time faculty to only two. In my third year, a persistent pattern of student harassment in one of my classes escalated to a stalking behavior and was met with near indifference on the part of university administrators. In my fourth year, university administration announced sweeping curricular changes, including elimination of the sociology major as well as other majors in my department. Throughout this time, I have also been verbally confronted by male students both during and after class at least three additional times.

Of course it has not been all bad. There have been many wonderful and rewarding experiences, mostly with incredible students and sometimes with colleagues and co-workers who have been my comrades in arms against these various university cuts. It is worth considering the counterfactual: is there a possibility that none of this chaos is related to my identity, scholarly and embodied, as a critical feminist? Indeed, the presence of budget cuts, program prioritization, dramatic reductions in faculty power, governance, and even stability, especially in Wisconsin, does not seem on the surface to bear any special relationship to feminism at all.

But the fact remains: the paths of my cohorts who were not critical feminist scholars, including even those who were hired at the same university at the same time as me, do not seem to have been as consistently rocky. As I carefully review the narrative of what exactly has happened to me over the last four years, it becomes clear that it is not just about being stuck in a bad job (in fact, this was supposed to be a great job) nor is it just about the university at large being in crisis. The constant disasters I have experienced as a junior faculty member are a microlevel reflection of the larger structural realities that face marginalized scholars in our current neoliberal moment.

The crisis of the corporate university amplifies the already challenging context in which critical feminists labor, and where our expertise is taken less seriously for a variety of reasons. We critical feminists teach not only feminism but also antiracism, queer theory, social justice, and the general concept of challenging social systems and received knowledge. We tend toward teaching styles that are democratic, allowing more space for dialogue in our classes, and, unfortunately, also more space for pushback than in a typical top-down lecture.

And we tend disproportionately to be people of color, women, indigenous, queer, trans, disabled, and nonnative to the United States, because this, ultimately, is who critical feminist scholarship has been written by and for. Whether it is what we teach, how we teach, or who we actually are, the evidence is overwhelming that we are not taken as seriously as our nonfeminist counterparts (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Torres 2003; Baker 2018; Matthew 2016; Mohanty 2003; Bailey and Miller 2015; Aikau, Erickson, and Pierce 2007). In fact, the feminist teaching literature is rife with stories of how we are constantly challenged by men in our classrooms and offices.

My argument is that while all scholars are subject to the whims of the corporate university, critical feminists bear its burden disproportionately. This is exemplified by my experiences in the academy. Reflecting a shocking lack of awareness of his own complicity and of the seriousness of the escalating stalking situation for me, the dean once said to me that whatever else happened, “I would get a good journal article out of all this.” The weight of these experiences produces a *critical feminist exhaustion*, a force of feminist exit and emotion experienced by feminists on many campuses. The seemingly extreme example of stalking highlights the institutional conditions that affect most critical feminists, ironically because stalking was not treated by administrators as a problem at all. The situations I detail in the sections below, while they initially seem disconnected, are, in the end, deeply intertwined. Regular occurrences of being yelled at by cismen who have some desire to dominate me are normalized as they crystallize into one singular incident of being stalked. These attacks take place as the stakes of “pleasing” students are raised due to low course enrollments and program prioritization. This is not an accident or the product of random circumstance, and it does not or could not happen to just anyone on campus. These are occurrences to which I am subject because I am myself. Critical feminist exhaustion is one of the forces of not only my personal feminist exit from this particular university, but a more general emotion experienced by feminists that can explain collective exits.

Below, I first discuss the reasons for using personal narrative as an appropriate format for illustrating these systemic concerns, including some pros and cons of using personal narrative in this case. I then describe how the increasingly corporate university, shaped by neoliberal priorities, creates a seeming paradox. Those of us in targeted fields are rendered constantly expendable (and thus at risk and perhaps trying to escape) but are simultaneously trapped by the additional work generated. Next, I describe my experiences on my own campus being read as a highly visible white queer feminist by both other faculty and students. As my body and identity have come to stand in for entire fields of study, the insecurity of my professional existence has overlapped and interlocked with the volatility created by my identity. This volatility is here symbolized by paradigmatic episodes. In this section, I have recounted in detail only the few incidents that I remember clearly. To reassemble these stories, I have returned

to what I have come to think of as my personal archive—my class rosters, my scanty personal journals, but especially the records of my emails and chat logs with my most supportive friends and comrades—to jog my memory.

Finally, I come to the tale of stalking and institutional betrayal, which is further complicated by issues of racial difference and intersectionality. I show how the institution rejected constructive solutions and allowed the student's behavior to escalate into a dangerous situation. What initially seems like an extreme event reveals itself as the university functioning normally. The stalking crisis is manufactured under the same conditions that produced the austerity crises, and these crises place certain university subjects more in their path than others. In the article's conclusion, I draw explicit links between the neoliberal university in crisis, the bureaucratic inaction that was directed at me, and the critical feminist exhaustion that was the end result.

Making It Personal

I began writing this article because, as a sociologist, I wanted to understand why these seemingly unrelated and even idiosyncratic crises seemed to be specifically swirling around me throughout my four years as a tenure-track faculty member. Upon analysis, it is clear each that it is the combination of my genderqueer identity and position as a critical feminist scholar that have placed me within the path of so much institutional conflict.

I tell this story in the form of personal narrative, which is appropriate given the intimate nature of the subject treated here and the intellectual traditions in which my theorizing is rooted. Feminists of course have long embraced the maxim that the “personal is political,” seeking to understand how larger interlocking systems of power operate at the level of our everyday individual lives (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983). Sociologists have also upheld what C. Wright Mills (1959) called “the sociological imagination” in order to understand the ways that individuals' lives are embedded in and structured by institutions, systems, and other relationships of power, including how this relationship is mutually constitutive (Bourdieu 1984). Ethnographic methods of participant observation emphasize the use of microlevel daily experiences to theorize macrolevel relations of power (Gowan 2010), and thoughtful analyses require some reflexivity on the ethnographer's own feelings and experiences while in the field (Stacey 1988; Scheper-Hughes 1992). Examples of powerful “sociological autobiographies” or analytical personal narratives abound (e.g., Ahmed 2017; Khan-Cullors and bandele 2017; Crosby 2017; Coates 2015; Shakur 1987), but the one from which I draw the most inspiration is Pierce's (2003) article about her struggle for tenure as a white queer feminist in my graduate department at the University of Minnesota.

The use of personal narrative here causes some complications, however. Like most real life subjects, I am not an ideal type, and my real personhood

tends to complicate neat analytical categories and theorization. My narrative is necessarily embedded in my particular body, identity, and context. This makes it harder to consistently distinguish between certain key concepts that are analytically distinct but overlap in my own narrative and experience. In lived reality, it is true that I identify both as a gender nonconforming person and as queer in my sexual interests. On my campus and in this narrative, the distinction between genderqueer as a gender presentation and genderqueer as an assumption about my sexuality tends not to matter much, although obviously the concepts of gender and sexuality are distinct. It is also true that this distinction does not matter to most of the people I interact with on a daily basis. The word “queer” can of course mean anything from queering gender; to being sexually attracted to people of multiple genders; to queer intersectional politics, queer time, or other ways to break and re-mix boundaries that we refer to under the umbrella of “queering” (Kafer 2013; Halberstam 1998; Crawley 2008). Given the space constraints here, I have attempted to deal with this by describing what is happening or who is involved in ways that allow readers to make their own decisions about which of these categories do and do not apply rather than adding a belabored explanation.

My narrative, like any, is shaped by my own white, racialized experience and would surely differ in important ways for queer faculty of color. The lived reality is that my campus is an intensely white environment with a single African American staff member and where the only nonindigenous faculty of color are international. The student body, too, is very white. In 2016, there were only five new Black students on the whole campus (University of Wisconsin–Superior 2016). This environment is extreme and somewhat unusual among college campuses. Although my candid approach to racial justice and development of several courses on the topic have earned me a certain reputation on campus, the reality is that in such a white place there are simply not enough aggregate individuals and interactions across racial lines for me to find patterns and to be able to analyze cisgendered interactions with a strong intersectional lens, especially when those interactions are narrowed to those of the nature I describe in this paper. This is a limitation of my case, and I hope that future analysis will build more substantially on this important element.

Importantly, personal narrative allows me to explore the emotional dynamics of the situation more fully. That exploration is an important political project in a cissexist, white supremacist rationalist institution that forbids the expression of emotions (Acker 1990, 2006; Ahmed 2017; Salaita 2014). I want to highlight rather than erase the profound sadness that I feel in part because the institution makes our emotions taboo. This story is emotional, and I do not believe I am the only one who feels this way. Just reviewing the data and reading others’ experiences of fear (e.g., Bailey and Miller 2015), I cried. What has caused me more intense trauma than being stalked was the profound experience of institutional disregard. We must give voice to these emotions if we hope to challenge the

mechanisms that drive critical feminists out of the academy. Being saddened and even terrorized and then left without any realm to express these feelings is another way of being forced out of the academy.

I am exhausted before I have even begun to tell this story, but I know that I am not alone. Critical feminists in many institutions are facing similar circumstances as neoliberalism has become the new normal. Hence, although my narrative is personal, it is true to Mills's call to place our biography in history. My personal story has resonance with others, and contributes to a broader theoretical understanding of (cis)gendered contours of university crises by showing how critical feminist exhaustion is produced in context at the micro, everyday level.

Manufactured University Crises Create an Expulsion Paradox

We live in a moment when the university “crisis” has become completely normal. This crisis is experienced more intensely, however, by people whose identities and/or research agendas do not fit the dominant white cis settler heteronormative frames and priorities that structure the university. I show below how the academy tries to expel us by rendering us constantly expendable as it corporatizes, while at the same time trapping us through decreasing our mobility. This trap, the *expulsion paradox*, is one that catches those who try to act rather than merely speak as critical feminists, in Salaita's terms (2014). We become a danger—a danger that is further emphasized by the “gender trouble” of gender nonconformity.

Without romanticizing the academy's past, it is undeniable that the landscape and job description for full-time faculty in 2018 has changed as a result of more fully corporate priorities. In the case of public universities, such as the one where I work, the decline in public funding has had noticeable effects across campus and has been part of a concerted attack on the institution of higher education itself by the Right (Newfield 2011). Anecdotally, collegial conversation at conferences revolves around the ways we are engaged in “re-branding” our departments in order to recruit more students or better ways to “market” what we do, often in an implicit competition with other departments or majors on the same campus. It is clear these tasks, while they may have been the responsibilities of faculty on certain committees, were not the responsibility of individual faculty in the not-so-long-ago past.

Nor have universities in the United States been places that were meant for genderqueer bodies, for people of color, for women, for disabled bodies, for people from the two-thirds world, or for anyone to do critical feminist scholarship, teaching, or activism. Nonetheless, we have arrived and in many ways, we have made the university our home (hooks 2000; Ferguson 2012; Aikau, Erickson, and Pierce 2007). However, this incorporation is limited, highlighted by our precarious positions as the first to go and the ways that what we do is not actually valued. While institutions advertise “diversity,” feminism, democratic teaching,

and a commitment to social justice as desirable, evaluative algorithms usually count publication as a primary criterion. The paradox is that queer feminists committed to democratic teaching and social justice barely have enough time to devote to scholarship and publishing in their field (Disch and O'Brien 2007). Furthermore, not only my experience but extensive research demonstrates that individualized teaching evaluations taken at the end of the semester generally do not contribute to the valuation of our teaching, either (Lazos 2012; MacNell, Driscoll and Hunt 2015).

The academy drives out critical feminist education by driving out the people who are most likely to provide it. There is a historical and ongoing relationship between the scholarship and the identity of the people who engage in it, and in its failure to provide the conditions for scholars from marginalized backgrounds to thrive or even exist, the university drives out the scholars and the fields. Finally, as critical feminist scholars, we all become a problem by pointing out problems (Ahmed 2017).

Critical feminist scholars are attacked both professionally and personally during manufactured university crises. When market logic is the dominant discourse and cost/benefit analysis the tool of the day in “program prioritization” budget-making decisions such as the ones I have twice undergone, programs invested with critical feminist priorities are more than likely to be among the ones that lose. After all, our programs are routinely the ones that have been attacked as the top-ten “useless majors,” and critical feminist faculty, especially women of color, are at the top of the list of right wing targets. Merri Lisa Johnson’s (2015) cautionary tale of the targeting of her Center for Women’s and Gender Studies program for its focus on lesbian and queer issues is but one of many such tales. A faculty member in my own department was even publicly attacked for teaching a course called “Teaching for Social Justice” (Murphy 2017). Our gender studies program already has no dedicated faculty or staff, only a committee of volunteer faculty and a rotating coordinator who receives a single course release for the year. In October 2017, during my fourth year on the tenure track, most of the programs that actually contribute to gender studies were axed even though gender studies itself was technically not affected.

The crisis of declining public funding cannot be uncoupled from a specific political project (Newfield 2011; Ferguson 2012; Chatterjee and Maira 2014). It is equally important to highlight how these “crises” are based in certain managerial models that have also gained dominance during the same time periods. These models involve greater numbers of administrators and of precarious workers on campus, especially adjunct faculty and outsourced employees.

This was the general environment that created the “necessity” of “program prioritization” in which I arrived my first year on the job, as well as the round of voluntary retirements in my second year. Paradoxically, just as these red flags started flying at my job, I was increasingly trapped precisely because

of the same factors. The progressive deepening of the manufactured crisis at the university made it progressively harder to be able to get a job. University crises often proceed through simply not replacing a faculty member, however they may leave. My sociology program shrunk from three faculty to two. I was already in a position of comparatively high responsibility for curriculum design and student recruitment as a junior member of a program of three (Disch and O'Brien 2007). Being left as half the program in only my second year, and to figure out how to sustain a major program with only two faculty members was stressful, to say the least.² Not only did this mean more service work, but it also meant that there were fewer of us teaching more preps in order to guarantee a sufficient curriculum for our students. In fact, women faculty in general tend to do more “institution specific” work of this kind that is thus less portable on the job market (Winslow 2010; Disch and O'Brien 2007), which must only become more severe during institutional crises.

These difficulties created by university crises only add to the existing asymmetries already borne by those of us who teach four classes every semester at regional comprehensives. These asymmetries are even more severe for contingent faculty, who face larger teaching burdens, an increased lack of stability, and greater barriers on the job market. It is no accident, then, that contingent faculty are more likely than their teaching-intensive counterparts to be women and people of color (Baker 2018; Matthew 2016). These teaching and service loads are already poorly understood by colleagues at other kinds of institutions, who are likely to be the ones reviewing our scholarship and job applications. Despite my personal love for teaching, the reality is that teaching is distinctly feminized work, and as such is devalued, especially in relation to scholarship (Bellas 1999; Winslow 2010). Teaching is tied to the care work of students rather than the more highly rewarded and freewheeling intellectual labor of research. There is also plenty of evidence that students expect more labor and more caring labor out of women (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012).

This is how the expulsion paradox functions: just as the warning signs appear at one's job, it becomes simultaneously more difficult to find the time to engage in the research and publishing necessary to ramp up our CVs for a serious job search. When the university is in (perpetual or increasing) crisis, you are never able to settle in and develop into your expertise. Instead, faculty have to take on more new tasks, teach overloads, or teach broader areas of study, teach a greater number of preps, sit on rapidly changing committees, and so forth. Over seven semesters, I taught eleven different courses.

One way to theorize why the high stakes may fall so disproportionately on the shoulders of critical feminists is the idea that the university is a place that tolerates radical ideas but not radical actions. Steven Salaita, one of the most well-known academics to be pushed out, in a chapter published before he was “unhired” at the University of Illinois, points out that

while most scholars and university administrators talk glowingly of engaging broad audiences and working to improve the world, such talk is invariably in the abstract, denoting a reproduction of ideals and not actual change—at least not the type that would threaten the socioeconomic privileges most administrators and professors ardently protect. It is sometimes from within this gap between discursive showmanship and the substantive praxis that controversies over faculty activism and scholarship arise. (2014, 218)

While feminists are at this point a mainstay of the academy, when we engage in tangible work to change it, either through action or perhaps even through our own identification with our areas of study, we become a problem to be expelled.

Salaita's distinction between the tolerance for radical speech and the intolerance for radical action (here also conceived as radical *existing*) could also explain why there is so much literature detailing the abuse of critical feminists in the workplace. Entire volumes describe feminists' negative teaching evaluations, the disrespect, the open and subtle challenges from students in the classroom and in our offices, and the ways some of our colleagues mentor us to deal with these challenges while others do not seem to get it at all (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Torres 2003; Mohanty 2003; Bailey and Miller 2015). The idea that our radical actions or existence is what makes us intolerable is reinforced by the personal experiences I detail below with an increase in severe conflict brought on by more consistent troubling of gender binaries.

And feminist disappointment comes hard in the academy because while of course feminists may be disliked in general and in workplaces, we expect the academy to be better. More disappointment and even more trauma is possible when there is this dramatic mismatch between what we expect and what we get. Acker (2006) suggests that there is less tolerance for inequality of race, class, and gender in an organization that has more democratic or participatory aims. Universities are hierarchical in nature, yet they espouse many explicitly feminist ideals. Cress and Hart (2009) find that only 57 percent of women believe that gender equity exists on their campus while 90 percent of men do; clearly not everyone is equally disappointed.

While I did not hold many illusions about the academy as a meritocracy when I entered it, it is still profoundly depressing to find that there may be no place for actually existing feminists in the academy, the very place that also birthed so many of these feminist ideas. hooks's *Feminism Is for Everybody* (2000) is but one of many genealogies of women's, gender, queer, and feminist studies that describes how the academy was a hard-fought space for the women who founded and wrote some important feminist theory.

Yet this was the case. During the socialization process of graduate school, the ghostly presence of two feminist faculty from before our time who had been denied tenure shaped my intellectual development as a feminist sociologist (Pierce 2003). The virtue of their tenure files had been confirmed by

external committees, which by extension condemned the decision of our own department, and both stories were spoken of largely in whispers, although both women continued to work as tenured faculty in other departments on the same campus. The most prevalent explanation was that these women were not just feminists but had been “too much” for the department (at that time) (Ahmed 2017), since they were not only women, and feminists, and lesbians, and one of the women was Black. I hoped that the stories were far enough in the past and that the department had changed, but in my heart of hearts I knew there was a reason these women were not often spoken of openly and that their ghosts told me more than their presence ever would have about the resistance to critical feminists from senior faculty, peers, and students (Gordon 1997). However much feminist theory may be a mainstay of the academy, as Salaita says, the university was still not a safe place for an actual feminist.

Perhaps naively, I never imagined that one day I would be using their stories and their published accounts to inspire me to write my own similar story. Nonetheless, once on the tenure track, I, too, found myself and my body representing entire academic traditions for better and worse, just like these “ghostly” feminist sociologists. And I found myself doing this in an increasingly competitive and neoliberal environment where there seemed to be less and less room for insurgent social justice-oriented academic traditions, or the people who represented them.

Becoming Queerly Visible

In this section, I describe how my own gender and sexual identity is articulated in my local context, because eventually I came to understand that “gender trouble” (Butler 1990) was at the heart of the institutional betrayals I experienced on the tenure track. It is doubtful that I would have arrived at a genderqueer identity were I not a feminist scholar, and it is less likely I would be as identified by others as a feminist scholar without my genderqueer appearance. A strong overlap between identity and field of study is common to political scholars, including critical feminists (Johnson 2015; Ahmed 2017; Salaita 2014; Torres 2003). Below I describe several other gender-policing episodes in order to place the stalking episode in a larger context of ongoing gender troubles where others tried to stabilize my gender and dominate me. Throughout these gender-policing episodes, the struggle over the role of emotions and politics in the university forms a common thread with the disproportionate harm done to critical feminist and marginalized scholars during the manufactured budget crises. In the following sections, I come back to the relationship between cissexist behavior and neoliberalism in academia, since the stalking conflict seemed to have only been possible within this particular neoliberal context.

To begin with, gender is nothing if not complex, and requires some elaboration. Following decades of feminist theory, I adhere to a nonessentialist,

nonbinary definition of gender (Fausto-Sterling 2012; Beauvoir 2011; Bornstein and Bergman 2010; Butler 1990) that is always in co-construction in local context (Halberstam 1998, 2012; Crawley 2008), as well as within macrolevel institutional systems of power (Hill Collins 2009; Crenshaw 1991; Davis 2015; Stanley and Smith 2015). We cannot simply define our gender for ourselves as individuals because we are both embedded within systems of power, and we are also somewhat at the mercy of how others “read” us (Crawley 2008). Yet, while gender is a performance, daily experience demonstrates easily that some find gender normative performances easier than others (Mathers 2017; Bornstein 2013). Here I present the evidence of how my own gender nonconformity was understood on my almost completely white, non-urban campus and how my identity was in turn reshaped. I only really realized I did not feel like a woman when I came to this campus and people did not treat me like a woman.

A few succinct, relatively harmless, examples of how my queerness was signaled by those around me: on the first day of one class, a student raised her hand and asked me in an aggressive tone, “What’s your family like?” It was only later that it dawned on me this seemed to be a coded way of asking me “Are you a lesbian?”

I wonder aloud why my (male) partner and I are being stared at when we walk into local bars. A colleague posits that it is perhaps my gender nonnormative presentation that causes curiosity locally. (In a much later conversation with locals, I learn that the real reason is more likely to be that in a small town like this one, people always assume they may know someone coming in, but are not open enough to smile at people they do not know.)

Another very feminine colleague stops by to tell me she finds my style interesting. The comment makes me highly self-conscious, maybe because I have always felt a little bit wrong in my clothes, like I am doing drag. I sometimes feel like a woman who is just not doing it right enough to quite fit into the “woman” box—a failure at womanhood. But this comment also hits a nerve because she asks me “what it’s called,” which makes me feel a little like an object of observation.

A colleague mentions my good fit for the job in gender studies because of my gender nonconformity. His comment is supportive, and is meant as a form of camaraderie, but it still surprises me. I start to look for ways that I stand out, ways that I do not—cannot really seem to—fit in, ways that others see me as set apart. I start to feel weird, or rather, queer.

These examples were not necessarily hostile (some of them were meant to be supportive, and others were pretty neutral), but they signaled visibility that had been invisible to me.

I am a small person for the upper Midwest where I teach—5’4” with my clogs on—and white. I was assigned female at birth, but am gender nonconforming. Almost all of my students and colleagues are also white. Although I’m in my late thirties, I look quite young for my age. It must also be said that I can only

describe myself as marginally queer. I am not a lesbian, I use my feminine, assigned at birth name, and I'm legally married to a man. I could easily be mistaken for a straight woman.

But then there are my clothes, my mannerisms, and my hair. I find myself sitting at the front of class, legs open, ankle to knee in a classically masculine pose. I am most comfortable in an Oxford shirt and men's jeans. I find the idea of teaching in a dress, quite honestly, terrifying. It seems that tales of femininity or lack of femininity often center on our hair. Even in graduate school when I had very long, femme hair, on the rare occasions I would wear my hair down, person after person would express surprise at my long hair. It was as if no matter what I actually did, I was a person who *should have* short hair. In other words, even with long hair, there was something butch about me. I now wear a man's style.

As I signaled above, gender is not only complex and constructed but also unstable over time (Halberstam 2012; Crawley 2008). Largely as a result of my increased feeling of queer visibility on campus, a year or two into my job, my gender identity began to shift. When I began my job as an assistant professor, I saw myself as a woman, if sometimes a failure at performing any version of femininity successfully. Prompted by the interactions described above, by the increasing presence of gender nonconformity in the culture in general, and by reading Kate Bornstein's fanciful *My New Gender Workbook* (2013) together with students, I embraced Bornstein's expansive definition of trans. I saw how Bornstein's gender outlaw ideas applied not only to my recent experiences on campus, but also resonated with a sense of self and struggle as inappropriately masculine that I had been having since adolescence. I shed my suppressed feeling of failing at womanhood and found freedom in the idea that I was not doing anything wrong if I was not a woman in the first place. I started using they/them pronouns and openly referring to myself as queer on campus, taking the opportunity to simultaneously uncloset myself. I cut my hair even shorter and began to self-consciously work on more masculine presentation to counteract my size and other feminine markers. Rather than feeling caught out by my new visibility (in other words, as if people were referring to a lack or failure), I started to see if I could cause gender confusion on purpose.

Halberstam (1998) has argued that female masculinities are some of the most rejected gender expressions and that they are rarely acknowledged as expressions in their own right but rather failures or maladjustments. My embrace of a more explicitly "female masculinity" seemed to be no exception. For example, I have experienced a clear pattern of confrontation from men in my classes. At least three times I have been challenged directly and inappropriately after class.³ Sometimes the men come up to me after class, frustrated about a missed assignment, a firm deadline, or a bad grade. Perhaps they do not even raise their voices (that much) or even at all. But they are red in the face, and they move a little closer to me, and we both know that they are larger than me. When I explain the answer to whatever the question is, they argue with it,

and do not accept my response, treating our interaction as a negotiation, using their physical presence with me as their bargaining chips rather than their rhetorical or logical skills (to say nothing of any actual oversight on my part). My first impression at the end of the interaction is consistently that this man has yelled at me, and I have had to think back carefully to decide whether that is literally true or not, important for reasons of accuracy and university reporting, but perhaps less important for understanding the gendered score of the situation. It is impossible to imagine these interactions happening in the same way if we were both sitting down, when they would not have the advantage of physical height. They do not take time out of their day to come to office hours or make an appointment.

Looking back, I feel as if I have been able to feel this conflict coming throughout the class period. Maybe a paper was handed back or a deadline was discussed at the beginning. I can remember a shadow passing on his face, or a leg twitching, and something told me to be alert at the end of class. These are not individual occurrences but elements of a pattern. These are men reacting to a person—a failed woman!—where they are not supposed to be.

The form of these challenges finds resonance in the literature on intimidation of women professors (Torres 2003; Bailey and Miller 2015; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012), but the sheer patterned regularity and to some degree their intensity seem unusual. My assertive women colleagues on campus do not face the same regular or intense challenges, even as their expertise may be challenged regularly or they may experience other kinds of harassment. These men react to me in a way that men usually do not treat unrelated women in public: their behavior is more confrontational and overtly violent rather than dismissive or covertly threatening. At the same time, their anger is motivated by my ostensible incompatibility with the role of the professor, just as it would be if I were a woman (Baker 2018). Nor is it easy to imagine male students feeling the desire or confidence to intimidate even a small male professor in this way. There is something not only gendered but specifically “genderqueered” about these hostile encounters.

Outside of the classroom, my increasingly queer identity caused conflict with my colleagues who held me to standards of emotional management that I could not seem to meet. Salaita’s (2014, 219) concept of somewhat inexact “adjective-happy” descriptions of his work by senior colleagues resonates strongly with my experience.⁴ I have remained the most junior member of my department, and I find myself constantly treated by senior colleagues as if everything I say is hyperbole, while the speakers place themselves in the position of reason or reasonableness. This is often done in a way that is not explicitly critical and can even be supposedly complimentary, but it reminds me of Sara Ahmed’s idea that as feminists we are just “too much, too” (2017, 77). At least once I can remember being told I was “too much” when a male colleague literally raised his voice up a pitch in an imitation of my voice to describe what was supposedly

going wrong in my interactions with my students (compared to a straight male colleague). This was a reference, I suppose, to my shrillness.

Mathers (2017) shows how cispeople expect genderqueer and trans people to assume the extra emotional burden created by their own “failures” to adhere to biologically essentialist ideas of a gender binary. In my institutional interactions, the particular expectation of emotional labor to which I was subject had overlapping dynamics with the emotional labor that is expected of white women in academia yet with different overtones related to others’ discomfort around my masculinity or failure to conform in one way or the other (Bellas 1999). It does not seem accidental that my senior colleague zeroed in on my voice, the same signifier of presumed biological sex mentioned repeatedly by respondents in Mathers’s research and one that would be a mismatch with my clothing or other markers of masculinity.

Although I have experienced a pattern of male students yelling at me in the classroom and am subject to irrational increases in my workload from the administration, I am expected not to express anger under any circumstance. The repression of the reasonable and respectful expression of anger at unjust experiences, a repression that is experienced even more forcefully by faculty of color (Matthew 2016; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al 2012; Baker 2018), reinforces an institutional work culture that privileges supposedly purely rational, intellectual, unemotional beings. This hyperrational culture maintains the gendered and racialized status quo of the university (Acker 1990, 2006) as our lives remain split into public and private spheres.

The implicit denial of emotions in the university is omnipresent and sometimes even becomes explicit. Both Ahmed and Salaita, in different ways, signal how the term “emotional” is an insult that is used against politically committed work(ers) in the university. Furthermore, some workers are implicitly expected to do more emotional labor than others, including managing the emotional outbursts “caused” by the reactions to our nonnormative identities and/or our politically committed work (these, of course, often overlap) (Mathers 2017; Ahmed 2017; Hochschild 2012). Setting aside for a moment the question of whether decolonial and feminist works (or the faculty who are invested in them) are any more emotional than colonial or sexist intellectual projects, we can see that the subtle degradation of the intellectual projects itself only functions because of the supposed inappropriateness of emotions in workplaces and at universities. One result of the denigration of more “emotional” intellectual projects is the increased possibility of their reduction or elimination during neoliberal accounting processes.

The relegation of emotions to the private sphere (implying that it is somehow possible to be present with each other as human beings without emotions) is a deeply gendered and racialized organizational structure that props up the heteropatriarchal, racist, and colonialist university. Straight white cisgender men represent the standard in appropriate stoicism, while women, people of

color, colonial subjects, and gender nonconforming others have all been accused regularly of being prone to fits of hysteria, irrationality, sentimentality, and overreaction. As members of these marginalized groups, we are, in different and perhaps incomparable ways, simultaneously subject to more stress upon our emotions and expected to exert more control over them.

As I came to the non-urban campus environment, my queer identity deepened in relation to the ways I was read as much more openly queer. In reaction, I faced more threatening gender policing and ran up against institutionalized norms discouraging the real expression of emotion. Below, I tell the story of how one such instance of “gender trouble” escalated into a much more serious event, as a marginalized student and I both became caught up in the neoliberal and cissexist, white supremacist logic of the institution. In the fall of my third year on the tenure track, I was stalked by a student. I have avoided writing this part of the story because I was afraid of becoming submerged in it. It turns out that it is difficult in public academic practice to make the personal political. I feel talked out when it comes to this story, and yet this story still feels like it needs to be told (Krausch 2017a, 2017b). Will being stalked by one of my students, and being abandoned by my university to deal with it on my own, be the defining point in my career? Could it be otherwise? Instead of focusing on either my research or my teaching, I am forced to focus on my physical safety, just as the manufactured university crisis previously forced me to focus on saving academic programs. I am afraid I am doomed to end up telling this story over and over, which has changed the trajectory of my entire writing and research agenda. To not do so feels like an irresponsible act, which allows the university to get away with its negligence. It feels like part of my responsibility as a feminist scholar devoted to a critical and reflexive research agenda to engage this new knowledge and share it with others who I fear are laboring in similar circumstances.

Stalking as Unexceptional Campus Violence

In fall of 2016, I was stalked by a student who was taking a class with me. Initially, stalking seemed shocking and abnormal. I had never heard or read about it happening to a faculty member on my campus or anywhere. But stalking, like other kinds of violence I described above, was quickly revealed as a normal part of the institution. Indeed, violence itself is normalized and even produced regularly on the academic campus, as an embedded part of the neoliberal, heteropatriarchal, and racist conditions.

Stalking can be difficult to define because it often consists of individual acts that are not criminal and may even separately seem normal. The thread that holds them together is that they include the persistence of unwanted contact or tracking of another person, such that it would “cause a reasonable person to feel fear” (The National Center for Victims of Crime 2018; Baum et al. 2009). These behaviors include unwanted gifts, phone calls or emails, tracking someone’s

whereabouts, and showing up or waiting somewhere. In my case, the student broke a no contact order issued by the university, risking his expulsion, in order to wait outside my office for me. He did so after making a threatening remark (he told two people he was going to “do something that was going to get him in trouble”). This behavior caused another person, my department chair, to be fearful enough to come find me, keep me away from my office, and accompany me out of the building completely. I myself took several hours to realize the severity of this action, perhaps because I/we learn to ignore violence once it has become so normalized.

But there should be no excuse for administrators who continued to deny the seriousness of the situation because they were specifically charged with being aware of these definitions and employing them at the institution. It is well documented that stalking can be extremely dangerous because stalkers are unpredictable, and things can therefore escalate quickly. In fact, stalking itself affects approximately 1.5 percent of the population and is known to be disproportionately common on college campuses (Mohandie et al. 2006; Brady and Bouffard 2014; The National Center for Victims of Crime 2018). Nonetheless, university officials seemed to feel that this incident was no big deal. The Title IX officer in charge of enforcing the no contact order revealed that she had heard the same threat as my department chair but had not found it necessary to even inform me or follow up with the student. The top administrator in charge of security casually suggested that I simply needed, as a professor, to carry pepper spray. The actions of administrators made it transparent that this level of violence is apparently normal within the institution and not the crisis that I understood it to be, despite the very real risk of serious and even fatal harm.

The institution was completely unprepared (and unwilling) to deal with this situation. I consulted two national experts and requested meetings to make plans for the following semester (for example, what would happen if the student registered for one of my classes?). As a sociologist, teacher, and critical feminist activist, I explained to everyone I spoke with how to define stalking, what constituted an appropriate remedy based on my research, and what accommodations were needed. Despite my initial fears that the student, who was Black, would be victimized by a rush to criminalization, the dean of students decided not to even enforce the no contact order—something that had been designed without my input or desire in the first place—although it had clearly been violated. Nor would the administration guarantee the presence of a safety escort, an action I requested for a month into the new semester (barring additional incidents) based on expert advice and the student’s continued presence on the campus. There I was, actively in fear, expected to find a way to do my job without requesting additional support or resources from the university, as administrators continued to insist in meeting after meeting that my requests were somehow impossible, unnecessary, or ridiculous.

My critical feminist exhaustion reached new levels when, because of the university's ongoing refusal to alleviate the situation, I was forced to ask my senior colleagues to accompany me down the hallway for bathroom breaks, to detail my whole schedule with my chair in order to develop a safety plan, and to undergo a performance review as if everything was normal on a scary first day back on campus after the winter break. My good relationships atrophied as I became isolated and fearful in an institutional environment where displaying signs of emotion is apparently considered a sign of weakness or unfitness for the profession (Baker 2018).

By this point in my career, it had already been made clear to me on the campus that I was not really wanted as a queer person, as a gender nonconforming person, or as a critical feminist sociologist. Administrators' constant threats toward the programs where I taught and mentored students were an undue burden, and this emotional and cognitive labor combined with the toll of others' anxiety about my genderqueerness. Within this already exhausting context, being stalked was treated as "my" problem—as something that was happening to me individually—and not as something that our campus had created, enabled, or was actively allowing to happen. Just like the manufactured budget crises that preceded and followed it, the stalking crisis felt almost designed to push me out.

Indeed, some of these same offices had been involved in an ongoing discussion for months prior to the stalking incident as the problematic pattern of my relationship with the student grew worse over the course of the semester. There had already been several incidents in the classroom and in my office, as well as several official meetings over how to resolve the situation when the stalking incident occurred. While the situation mirrored in many ways other incidents with cismen yelling at me in class, this conflict was significantly complicated by the element of racial difference. Because he was a working-class Black freshman, I knew this student faced a much higher set of barriers than most of my other students, and I worried more about who would advocate for him if I did not. I certainly worried more about involving the disciplinary apparatus of the university and especially security than I would have in the case of a white male student. I speculated that the student's issues with me had to do not only with attempts to dominate me as a genderqueer person similar to those I have described above, but that our conflicts also stemmed from racial difference. In this vein, I initially tried to work out the problems that arose with him interpersonally in a way that I would not have engaged gender- or sexuality-based conflicts because I saw myself in the role of the dominant group and the student as marginalized (although still acting inappropriately). After several incidents and more reflection, however, his actions fit the same patterns as the white cisgender men I described above. And what eventually became most clear is that aside from his social characteristics, the student's behavior was that of a very troubled individual during this period of time.

Once other offices on campus did become involved, I developed solutions that were specifically tailored to my understanding of the student's individual needs and the needs of the other students in the class. For example, my chair and I suggested that the student could complete the class over email. Allowing him to do the course over email made sense for a lot of reasons. It could allow more flexibility in the curriculum tailored to his needs, allow me to give him more personal attention, and would also allow me during class to focus on the other students rather than on the dynamic created by his challenging behavior. This would have taken extra time on my part, but it is also obvious that what a young Black man might need to learn from an introductory race and ethnicity class is not the same as what the majority white students need (this is always one of the significant difficulties of designing a successful course). The plan also used email and limited in-person contact as a route to generally de-escalate my relationship with the student, and as a way to protect both parties by documenting our interactions.

These suggestions were outright rejected, which was a serious disservice to both of us. University administrators insisted that by suggesting the student complete the class over email with personalized attention he would be "denied his right to an education." But this student, and specifically a marginalized student, was robbed of his education by an institution that did not uphold the right of faculty to determine the content of their classes by giving them the right to tailor their classes and their delivery for the specific needs of their students. He was disserved by an institution that spent the next few weeks reinforcing the idea that he was incapable of learning how to adjust to expectations and earn his grades but should be given a pass anyway, presumably because he was either an object of fear and/or a consumer.

My plans and suggestions were all about finding alternatives that would change the dynamics of our relationship (or mitigate them) and head off the possibility of things getting worse. Administrators on the other hand did not seem concerned about avoiding violence (symbolic or physical) in advance or taking proactive preventive action, on my behalf, this particular student's behalf, or on behalf of the other students in the class. To begin with, the other students seemed actually invisible to the administrators throughout the entire process. I was unable to make the Freirean, discussion-based format of my class understood. In the bureaucratic framework of the university, the other students' perspectives and experiences only mattered insofar as they were "witnesses," but not insofar as their own educational experience was severely affected. The official university not only failed to recognize the value of discussion-based, feminist pedagogy but its very existence. Administrators were more concerned with controlling my behavior rather than avoiding violence, something I was concerned about avoiding for everyone's sake. My suggestions were not only rejected; I was given no alternative options other than continuing on a clear collision course. Officials casually suggested calling security if any problem

“happened” to occur. Administrators did not seem to see violence as a crisis to be prevented but a normal and expected event. It was a normal part of the campus meant to be reported on a screen once it occurred.

The stalking incident brought to the fore the sense of crisis I had been experiencing from my arrival on campus and exposed the institution’s failure to provide even basic working conditions. There were no resources to protect me physically, no recognition and literally no place for my teaching, and eventually no place for me. It exhausted whatever was left of my time and emotional energy, leaving me nothing for myself or my research. But this exhaustion had a particular political dimension too; it was *critical feminist exhaustion*. Not just anyone would have been susceptible to be stalked. Not just anybody would have been susceptible to be so completely disregarded by the institutional process. Not just anyone could be so easily written off as being too emotional or hysterical in their trauma. Not just any professor of any topic would have felt an obligation to be there for certain students, to avoid calling the police and seek constructive resolutions, and to continue being in the institution afterward for other students.

Since this incident, I have continued to point out that our campus needs to implement real changes in its ability to respond to stalking situations because it is extremely likely that other people on campus will experience stalking specifically, and it is abundantly clear that there is insufficient institutional support (Krausch 2017a; Hattersley-Gray 2012). The university is no longer a place where I can do my work outside of very strict work hours when I know full-time staff are present. I have refused to hold classes or meetings outside of those hours primarily out of respect for students who may not have disclosed intimate partner violence/stalking or other concerns, and so that they do not need to disclose these concerns simply to attend their classes. The university ceased to be a place where I could work, just as literally as it does during a program closure. I have been told, however, that a review by administration has found that there is no safety concern (!) so nothing will be changed. These patterns teach us that some people belong in the academy while others do not. I feel sure that some bodies might have been more worth protecting than mine was, just as I imagine that others (especially people of color) might have received an even more summary dismissal and worse treatment.

Feminists need not be stalked in order to experience this kind of institutional betrayal, or to feel it pushing us out of the academy entirely. Perhaps we see it happening to our colleagues. Or perhaps we feel its veiled threat when cismen yell at us in our classrooms. Or maybe we realize we are the ones subject to these threats when we are asked about our ways of being (“what’s your family like?”). Or we simply know after so many prioritization exercises that we will be the ones left without rescue boats when the time comes. This institutional betrayal is a presence in and of itself that stalks us and pushes us constantly toward the door.

Personal Exits Become Collective Exits, But Conclusions Can Be Beginnings, Too

My exit from this university is not just a personal exit from a single university; rather it is symbolic of a collective exit of others from the entire academy. There is a spiral effect to the disproportionate work experienced by those of us who must simultaneously negotiate embodying difference, advocating for improved safety policies for marginalized groups on campus, and maintaining threatened programs in the face of stiff resistance (even as we have been invited to the institution in many cases for these purposes). This extra work is emotional as well as material, and leaves many of the most precarious faculty in an expulsion paradox—less able to leave toxic jobs even as they have more reasons to leave. Sometimes the only option left for me/us is to leave the academy entirely, and perhaps this is not a side effect of these circumstances but maintenance of the status quo. Perhaps when critical feminists like me are driven out of the academy, the system is functioning as it is meant to.

Women, queer, trans and genderqueer, people of color, and other marginalized faculty are also more likely to work in marginalized fields; for many (most?) of us, our identities overlap with our fields, and this makes us subject to the violence of the austerity conditions of the neoliberal university. By illuminating the lived reality of being a critical feminist, we can see how the interaction between these different factors plays out. We seem more likely to lose our jobs, we seem more likely to lose our job autonomy, and we seem more likely to suffer from physically unsafe working conditions in the university itself.

Furthermore, it is well documented that female faculty experience threatening behavior from cisgender male students, and that furthermore this experience is intensified for female faculty of color at the hands of white male students. What has not been as well documented, and what I have tried to contribute here, is how the classroom and institutional experiences for gender nonconforming faculty differ even as they are also shaped by the same gender regimes. Genderqueer experiences cannot be understood if they are always collapsed into the category of “everyone but cismen” (although that is sometimes a useful analytic category), because the genderqueer experience is singular and different from that of being a woman. In the case I have illustrated here, it has led to not only a more intense experience of violence but also more frequent challenges of a different nature than my female colleagues.

Moreover, my case demonstrates that gendered harassment and gendered institutional nonresponse exist together with university crises where our agendas are too emotional, too political, “too much, too”—too expendable. Program cuts that target gender and women’s studies departments, the interdisciplines, and even sociology, are not separate from the problems of sexual, heterosexual, and racist harassment on our campuses but deeply intertwined. These phenomena are part of a constellation that make up the colonialist, racist, patriarchal

institution in which we labor. Where our research agendas are shaped and derailed by our personal run-ins, these phenomena become inseparable.

Take for example the survey on sexual harassment in academia gathered by Karen Kelsky of *The Professor Is In* blog (2017). Kelsky states that one of the main findings of her data is the way that the trajectory of women's academic careers are completely changed by their experiences with sexual harassment. In a university system where cisgender white men continue to act as institutional gatekeepers, the overwhelming result of harassment seems to be the victim changing the topic of research, changing institution, or dropping out altogether—in other words, a complete shift of research agenda. Sexist and patriarchal institutions (at the departmental as well as university levels) are shaping the knowledge that is produced in profound ways.

There are many ways a research agenda can be derailed. My story elucidates the interconnectedness of several of these via the concept of critical feminist exhaustion. I was too exhausted by the perpetual crisis, by the emotional labor of teaching, by the visibility of queerness and the gender trouble it caused, by the fear that what I did produce would not be valued as “too much,” by the time-consuming nature of fighting for safety accommodation, by the trauma of being stalked, and finally by the struggle to save liberal arts itself in northern Wisconsin to produce research about anything else (UW Dismantle Blog Collective 2018).

The lack of an active research agenda does not just take something away from me (or us) personally (Bartram 2018), but of course means I have less ability to find another job—a significant problem when my program is being eliminated, and one I am also probably not alone in facing (and a problem that confronts contingent faculty even more dramatically and pressingly). Winslow (2010) shows that women are more likely than men to spend more time each week on teaching than they would prefer and less time on research. She adds that women are in general more likely to leave a job when there is a mismatch between how they would prefer to spend their time and how they have to spend it. This may be leading women to leave academia, and with fewer credentials that are helpful, in part because women do more work that is institution specific, which is also a substantive disadvantage on the job market.

Ultimately, of course, we have a certain amount of agency in our decisions whether to stay and fight or to exit the academy for good. Some days I am inspired by Halberstam's (2011) concept of queer failure and wonder what it would be like to remain in the academy without attempting to succeed at it, understanding that success is an already flawed goal. I continue to meditate on Ferguson's (2012) position that we won this place and perhaps we can keep it somehow, understanding that it will always be flawed and wrong for us. Most days, however, I return to Salaita's (2017) pronouncement that he would be exiting the academy for good: “I can speak according to the whims of my conscience. This is what happens when you manage to survive a punishment. You become free.”

I write this article not knowing what it may do to my chances of future hire, but wishing, above all to be free. I can only be free by acting free. We may be able to decide whether we want to stay in or stay out, but we must acknowledge, as critical feminists, that the institutions are trying to force us out.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Jane Andrew, Erin Dyke, Douglas Hartmann, Wenjie Liao, Cyrus Pireh, the anonymous reviewers, and the editors Katja Guenther and Marta Maldonado for their generous feedback on this manuscript. I dedicate this article to Trudy Fredericks, Aimee Peterson, and everyone else who risked themselves to try to save a place at the University of Wisconsin–Superior for critical feminists, marginalized people, and the liberal arts.

Notes

1. I follow Chandra Mohanty (2003) in her preference for this term over Third World or Global South.
2. We do not make a regular practice of employing contingent faculty, nor did we have a budget to do so.
3. There have been numerous times that men in my classes have tried to step in to take over and facilitate class discussions, and at least three inappropriate incursions into my office space ranging from patronizing to very serious (all white except for one man). I was also once yelled at by a female student in my office, but this is the only time that a woman has engaged in any of these behaviors, and it did not fit into these patterns in any other respect.
4. Salaita is referring to his experiences being tenured in 2009 at Virginia Tech prior to his infamous “unhiring” at the University of Illinois in 2014.

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