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cjdseditor@uwaterloo.ca

Eds. Gutiérrez y Muhs, Gabriella, Yolanda Flores Neumann, Carmen G. González, & Angela P. Harris. *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2012. ISBN 978-0-87421-922-7

Reviewed by F. Cheuk
Doctoral Student, OISE, University of Toronto

Since the 1990s there has been an increase of cis-gendered women participating in higher education, and female university graduates currently outnumber males (Turcotte, 2011). However, these demographics do not consider disability, race, sexuality, and/or other marginalized group differences nor do they reflect the embodied experiences of women who continue to experience sexism, racism, ableism, and homophobia within the ivory tower. *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* is crucial for addressing and exposing the exclusionary barriers experienced by women facing interconnected gendered and racial discrimination. In the introductory chapter, Harris and González alert the reader to the types of problematic and oppressive power dynamics these chapters go on to reveal by inviting the reader to note that “silences speak from within this anthology” (10). They share myriad reasons why many women of colour could not publish their experiences or knowledge in this anthology. These reasons highlight the vulnerable position that women of colour occupy despite privileged tenured positions in academia, including spirit wounds, psychological trauma, fear of retaliation, fear of embarrassing their colleagues, and fear of exacerbating tense relationships with their home institutions (11). Together, they emphasize that power is sustained through barring disruptive or oppositional voices from reaching out and that one must also read the silences and absences in any text focused on social justice.

In this collection women of colour and white women allies who have worked, taught, or studied at American and Canadian universities contribute over 30 different personal narratives

and qualitative studies. These collective voices indicate that there is much to be done before academia can be conceptualized as anything other than privileged and exclusive. Editors Harris and González state that their intention in this anthology is to do the following:

Provide a framework for understanding the contradictory culture of academia. On one hand, the university champions meritocracy, encourages free expression and the search for truth, and prizes the creation of neutral and objective knowledge for the betterment of society—values that are supposed to make race and gender identities irrelevant. On the other hand, women of color too frequently find themselves “presumed incompetent” as scholars, teachers, and participants in academic governance (1).

The ideological basis of this book is that women of colour move through academic spaces with the presumption that they are not qualified to be scholars due to their racial and gender identities. The text reminds the reader that higher educational institutions have historically been, and currently still are, oriented around white heteronormative non-disabled males. Stories include encounters with both overt and covert racism and sexism from students, colleagues, and administrators in the form of the following: disrespect from students and faculty, misogyny, homophobia, class biases, dismissal of reports about racist or sexist incidents, stereotyping and tokenism, as well as hyper-scrutiny. These narratives attenuate to the embodied identities of women of colour and contextualize their experiences to racist structural issues within higher education such as inequitable policies, racist hiring processes and stereotypes, and prejudiced assumptions about affirmative action. In Kupenda’s chapter, a black female professor talks about having the “mammy” stereotype imposed on her when her white dean requested that she give up the precious research time she needed to qualify for tenure track to teach courses during the summer *because* she was perceived to have “nurturing” qualities associated with being a black woman (23). Further, in Arriola, a lesbian Latina law professor had been discouraged from even applying for tenure track by her white dean and committee despite an impressive repertoire of

publications. She was also discouraged by a white heterosexual female colleague who was already tenured from writing an article that was “too feminist, too lesbian, too controversial” (378). Easton’s chapter includes a story where still another woman of colour was called in for an interview and told by the interviewers that she was hired because she fulfilled their requirements for diversity (159). The contradictory nature of academia as framed in Harris and González’s introductory chapter is evident in the experiences shared in this volume, where racialized and gendered identity markers invoke biased treatment and attitudes.

At this point the reader may be curious about why literature that focuses on intersections of gender and race is being reviewed in a Canadian disability studies journal. As a first generation woman of colour with disabilities who is just beginning to pursue a career in academia and has a research focus on intersections of race, diaspora, and disability I was excited to read this text. Initially I was drawn to this book by the notion of “presumed incompetency.” The idea suggested by the words seems to resonate with the core principle behind ableist practices—that is the idea that one is not qualified enough to participate in a given social institution. I was interested in gaining insight into the entanglement of racist, sexist, and ableist discourses within university spaces through the authors’ lived experiences. Hence, I was disappointed that there is little mention of disability as an intersection to gender and race in this text. However, having come across many critiques about disability studies’ lack of intersectionality (Bell 2006), I attenuated to the absences of disability.

It became apparent that while not discussed using language and describing barriers that are recognizable to current disability studies scholarship, disability is still embedded within many of the themes discussed in the book. Attaching ideas of incompetency to group identities has adverse consequences that are familiar from disability studies: Bowen’s account of the

invisibility that a black female student experienced as professors ignored her questions and acted as though the administrators made a mistake in allowing her entrance (129); Jacob's consideration of the exhausting extra work that a representative of a minority group in academia is expected to take on without compensation (243); Kupenda's concern with the stereotyping and objectification involved in being regarded as a token (21); Niemann's thoughts on the difficult position of being made to choose between her scholarly identity and her other identities in order to receive a tenure track position (341); Moffit et al.'s chapter on the "super" mentality that is often critiqued in disability studies as the "supercrip" phenomenon (101); and Douglas's work on the discriminatory attitudes women of colour experience in academia due to the belief that they are only affirmative action hires (58).

Finally, a consistent theme in this book which further blurs and complicates the social boundaries between race and disability is health. Many of the articles highlight how constant battles against racism in the academy have physical or psychological effects on women's bodies. Holling, Fu, and Bubar frame the "physical manifestations of racism" (258) as health matters, identifying mental health issues, chronic illness, autoimmune disorders, cancer, and many more. In doing so they identify disability as the inherently negative consequence of racism on the bodies, minds, and spirits of women of colour in higher education, thus highlighting the issue that struggles against racism and struggles against ableism are often pitted against each other in the academy. This idea combined with Harris and González's introduction contextualize these tensions along the corporatization of universities in that programs directed toward inclusion and diversity are often made to compete for the same small pool of funding for which specification is required, thus rendering the academic environment hostile toward ally-ship and solidarity (5).

In addition to these heartrending and often infuriating accounts which problematize the social organization of higher level education in five different areas (general campus climate, faculty/student relations, allies, social class, and tenure), the authors in this collection also offer critical insight and lessons on resistance, resilience, and survival for women of colour and their allies. This is exemplified in the last chapter, wherein Niemann composes a list of comprehensive strategies based on the knowledge shared by other contributors to this book. These are strategies which women of colour and their allies can apply to address intersections of racism and sexism in their teaching practices, everyday interaction in their university community, and administrative roles (446). These recommendations can be grouped into three areas of application: interpersonal awareness, structural conditions, and personal strategies for survival and resistance. For example, the advice that administrators should “value and expect scholarship and teaching on social justice and emancipative social thought” (471) addresses the fact that these topics are currently not yet part of the dominant social discourse in North America. Hence, being the sole faculty member to teach these courses in addition to the racist and ableist biases women of colour face in the classroom would mean that students’ personal grievances against the course content would be directed toward their teaching. Furthermore, being the sole representative would communicate that the subject matter is not valid enough for white and/or non-disabled faculty members to include it. The calls to “understand why people are leaving the university” as well as “develop an ‘equity scorecard’ to determine how faculty members fare by gender and race/ethnicity [and disability] by department and college” encourage administration to examine whether the amount of marginalized faculty members leaving is disproportionate to those who fit the white able-bodied male mainstream. Additionally,

they allow the issue of prejudice to be uncovered and recorded as relevant factors to retaining and having women of colour and/or disability represented in higher education.

Thus *Presumed Incompetent* enriches one's understanding of what counts as a disability experience by granting insight into the tension and fluidity of oppressive experiences between disability and other marginalized social identities. I recommend that disability scholars interested in intersectional approaches to ableism read this book as it brings disability in conversation with gender, race, and sexuality rather than as an apolitical or depoliticized field which has been strongly critiqued as a 'white' field (Bell, 2006).

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