

Review Essays



Diversity Matters

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Although both *Power, Race, and Gender in Academe* (edited by Shirley Lim and Maria Herrera-Sobek) and *Coming of Age in Academe* (by Jane Martin) deal with diversity within the academy, they arise out of very different contexts. Martin's book looks back nostalgically to the 1970s when feminists powerfully and forcefully described the situation of women inside and outside the academy and when they were connected in important ways to non-academic activists. In contrast, Lim and Herrera-Sobek's edited collection celebrates the shift of attention away from women and gender exclusively within feminist studies and toward sex and gender as they articulate with other factors such as race and class. It is useful to place the two books in dialogue with one another because their similarities and differences are a measure of the distance feminists have come within the academy as well as the considerable distance we have yet to go. I'll focus on representations of problems within the academy, theoretical underpinnings, and solutions to the problems they identify.

Problems within the Academy

According to Martin, women today are estranged from one another and are powerless within the academy because they have been co-opted by the male-dominated academy and thus their potential to effect change has been contained. As Martin sees it, feminism within the academy has regressed because it has lost touch with the feminist activist movement beyond the academy. Academic feminism has also become dominated by theory written by men; it has dismissed earlier feminist work as essentialist; and it has lost its powerful voice. She points out that many of the important feminist works in the 1970s were written by non-academics,

and she illustrates the point by briefly discussing Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful*, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, and Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*. During this time, according to Martin, women supported each other and presented a united front to men, who seemed determined to undermine their efforts. But Martin finds that this productive era was replaced in the 1980s by one in which women academics began attacking each other, usually on the grounds that these earlier discussions constructed gender as an unchanging essence and ignored race and class. She finds it disturbing that it no longer seems permissible to discuss gender or women at all since these categories are considered to be essentialist.

During the 1980s, Martin suggests, feminist theory and research severed its connections to the women's movement outside the academy, lost its passion, and had a failure of nerve. She laments the attacks on such feminists as Adrienne Rich and Carol Gilligan and the embrace of such male theorists as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-François Lyotard. Although Martin's field is the philosophy of education, she attempts to reach an audience of feminists from a variety of fields within the academy so that feminist inquiry can get back on track. According to Martin, the problems identified by feminists in the 1970s are still with us today, so that work is by no means outdated or irrelevant. If women had to struggle to find a role for themselves in the academy in the 1970s, their situation has not improved. If anything, they are even more estranged from one another because they have ceased to bond with other women and have adjusted to the academy by internalizing its values and practices. She complains that "we have lost the ability we once had to speak our minds," that the "education-gender system" produces "mindless bodies" that banish "feelings and emotions from the scholarly realm," and that women have become ghettoized within the academy and have everywhere encounter a "chilly climate." To be successful, women must develop qualities that are genderized in favor of males. Martin fears that feminist scholars are leaving women students in a "state of near paralysis" by condemning earlier feminist theory and research without providing adequate alternatives.

The contributors to *Power, Race, and Gender in Academe* describe even greater feelings of estrangement within the academy. Many of the essays are dark indeed, providing detailed accounts of discrimination, vicious infighting, exclusion, and demoralization. The essays describe an academic culture that is rooted in traditional familial and racial patterns. They also describe an academy that has begun to include other races,

classes, and ethnic groups, often as a result of affirmative action efforts, without preparing the way so that they will feel welcome and included and so that their different scholarly contributions will be understood and appreciated. John Williams, a retired African American faculty member who held distinguished professorships at two different universities, sums up the prevailing mood: "The academy was never all that comfortable with the presence of most of us in it, whether as students or teachers." And although the object of attack is often the white male power structure, minorities are sometimes described as discriminating against and excluding each other. C.L. Chua, for instance, speaks of fellow faculty members frequently being "grudging and sometimes downright obstructionist" but also of being given the "cold shoulder" by two established Asian-American literati for being a foreign-born Asian. W.S. Penn constructs a fictionalized description of a tenured native American scholar who attempts to block the achievement of tenure of a considerably more accomplished native American junior faculty member. Robyn Wiegman describes academic departments as families that impose codes of behavior that exclude individuals whose lifestyles are not heterosexual.

Carrie Tirado Bramen addresses the problem of the widespread tendency to blame affirmative action hiring practices for the reduction of positions available to whites. She establishes that the accusation is unfounded because the number of minority hires has not increased in recent years—that is, minority scholars are still in the minority. She also attributes the real cause of a shrinking job market to downsizing and the replacement of permanent academics with temporary ones. Nearly thirty-eight percent of teachers in higher education, according to Bramen, are part-time or nontenure-track. Martin does not touch on this problem at all.

Annette Kolodny also emphasizes the problems that have resulted from a tight job market—namely, that women and minorities are still predominantly clustered in the generally untenured ranks of assistant professor and lecturer. Like Martin, she recognizes that affirmative action efforts have too often been aimed at adding women and others from underrepresented groups to structures designed for a white male professoriate. She observes that too often women and minority faculty have a hidden workload in the form of student advising, differential course assignments, and major responsibilities for home-keeping and child-rearing. She also points out that women and minorities have often been hired at a time when standards for promotion and tenure are changing so

that they are often being evaluated by individuals whose records are considerably weaker than their own. Another problem is the widespread problem of inappropriate statements by external referees.

Both books deal with estrangement from the academy and from others within the academy, though Martin focuses primarily on women while the contributors to Lim and Herrera-Sobek's volume also focus on race. Both books emphasize the limitations of affirmative action, though contributors to the Lim and Herrera-Sobek book see threats to affirmative action as part of the problem, too. Both books make evident the fact that the academy is still structured by and for white males, and women and minorities enter it at considerable risk. If they conform, they lose connections with non-academics from their own group. If they do not, they get lost within the academy or must leave it. There are a number of parallels between the ways in which the two books define the problem they are analyzing. The theories that underlie the problem definitions differ considerably, however.

Theoretical Underpinnings

As I have already mentioned, Martin's defense of earlier forms of feminism hinges on a critique of charges of essentialism, and she sees these attacks as damaging and divisive. She recognizes that feminist scholarship "stands to gain from the reminder that essence talk masks differences and that this masking can be destructive." She also admits that feminist scholars "were right to flag the trap of false generalization," but she defends the right of feminists to make carefully warranted generalizations. She suggests that the essentialism controversy "promotes a view of women who differ from oneself as utterly Other," and she finds that the culture of fear produced by the essentialism debate estranges feminist scholars from one another.

Martin's defense of essentialism results in a conception of women's studies that ignores race and class. She says, "The fact that race and class have been considered fundamental variables in research about men scarcely entitles them in advance to the privilege these concepts now enjoy in the study of women." She argues that "the fact that the concept or category of race illuminates the institutional practices of a racist society does not automatically make it a fruitful explanatory category for every theoretical inquiry." Later in the book, however, she recognizes that it is important to ask how the chilly climate within the academy is different for women of color and white women, for lesbians and for heterosexual women.

The essays in *Power, Race, and Gender in Academe*, in contrast, insist on the necessity of attending to gender in relation to race. Johnella Butler describes the welcome shift within women's studies when white women began to "move away from the insistence on the primacy of gender" and "all of us began to conceptualize the interconnectedness among race, class, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual identity, and religion." They also make evident that focusing on difference does not preclude focusing on unity. Butler, for instance, speaks of revealing the "unity in diversity, the sameness in difference," and she asks, "How can we live together with different moral positions without hatred, violence, or imposition and without permissiveness and amorality?" She speaks of the need for "myriad coalitions" to meet the challenges of racism and to defeat it. Ruth Hsu finds that it is class, race, and gender divisions that alienate us from one another. Clearly, then, mitigation of alienation necessitates facing rather than ignoring those divisions. If the academy is still what Hsu calls "a fundamentally conservative, Eurocentric, and masculinist institution in its hierarchical structure, modus operandi, and cultural assumptions," then minorities alone, who after all represent a very small percentage of academic faculties, cannot possibly change it. Hsu is not entirely confident, however, that white women will be of help since she sees them as often "engaged in garnering power for themselves and not in challenging or reimagining the nature and function of that power."

Martin defends discussions of women that ignore race and class and finds the essentialism argument to be rooted in male discourse and to work against the interests of feminist theorists. She finds that it divides women and delegitimizes research that focuses on women and that employs methods that challenge traditional ones. The contributors to *Power, Race, and Gender in Academe*, however, demonstrate some limitations of essentialist conceptions of gender and make evident that the situations of minorities are different from those of white, middle-class women. Solutions to the problems outlined in the two books focus on ways of eliminating alienation within the academy. When their solutions differ, it is because the two books are rooted in two different approaches to the achievement of social justice.

Potential Solutions

Martin's solution to the problem of women's alienation in the academy is for women to reconnect with one another, cross disciplinary lines, build "homelike public places," and transform the academy's underlying system of beliefs and practices. Rather than simply conforming to an

alienating system, women need to work toward forging a new and improved academic culture. It is not enough, Martin makes clear, simply to add women to the academy as it now exists and to assume that equity has therefore been accomplished. Rather, the present system must be dismantled. Academic institutions need to include consideration of the home as well as the public sphere. They need to attend to matters of feeling rather than cultivating unfeeling detachment. Martin admits, however, that this is a tricky business: if women devalue the home and female-associated objects of study and inquiry, the result is a form of self-denigration; if they value them, however, they run the risk of being devalued by everyone else. But Martin does think that feminist scholars can investigate female-associated cultural phenomena without romanticizing them and without wallowing in their own victimization.

Martin sees the need to develop groupings that transcend disciplinary boundaries and the barriers between women faculty and women students, and to create ties among women students, faculty, administration, and staff. She describes the Swedish practice of instituting morning and afternoon coffee, cake, and conversation sessions as a way of breaking down barriers. She also recommends potluck meals and the creation of archives in which women's ways of living in the academy are documented, as are their ways of coping well or badly with academe's chilly climate. She also calls for weekly meetings, workshops, and conferences at which feminist scholars (such as Patricia Mann and bell hooks) are invited to describe ways they have managed to avoid the trap of devaluing practice (which she associates with women's work) in contrast to theory (which tends to privilege detachment and to be written by men). And she envisions an institute in which women would be able to enter into conversations with community leaders from all walks of life.

The solutions described in *Power, Race, and Gender in Academe* tend to make use of, while altering, structures already in place within the academy. Kolodny calls for the development of a clear set of criteria for promotion and tenure as well as new procedures for their implementation. The criteria need to address changing venues and forms of publication such as textbooks, software programs, video presentations, and translations. They also need to protect women and minority faculty from a debilitating hidden workload. Kolodny also calls for setting minimum qualifications for faculty within the college who would serve on promotion and tenure review committees so that review committees include "only faculty members who have met the current criteria by which the candidates under consideration are being judged." She observes, for

instance, that only scholars who have themselves produced a book for peer judgment would know that books do not receive universally laudatory reviews.

Bramen calls for unionization. She says that the "most powerful way to challenge organized industry, finance, and commerce" is to unionize. Unions, according to Bramen, can mobilize and resist downsizing within the academy using various strategies such as lobbying legislators. She mentions three that have had success in defending higher education: the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and the American Association of University Professors. Bramen finds that unions need to address the growing diversity of their membership in terms of racial and ethnic composition as well as the increased number of part-time and nontenure-track faculty.

Susana Chávez-Silverman calls for a "tropicalized" approach to teaching, an approach inspired by the writings of multiply positioned gendered, ethnic, and racial subjects. Such an approach allows Chávez-Silverman to embrace and theorize her own "biracial, culturally hybrid self." Chávez-Silverman makes women, sexuality, race, and ethnicity central subjects of inquiry in the courses she teaches; she structures courses so that student journal entries rather than faculty questions guide the discussion; and she employs a student-centric question-and-discussion format. In order to decenter the traditional authority of the teacher, Chávez-Silverman circulates manila folders containing magazine, newspaper, and journal articles, as well as announcements and advertisements—all of which pertain to the subject matter of the course. She attempts to foreground "a performative, hybrid version of my self-as-teacher, a self that defers closure and celebrates ambiguity and solicits, thus, an analogous positionality from my students."

Martin's solutions emphasize bringing women's culture into an academy dominated by male culture. She would like to see more connect- edness, collaboration, and cooperation. The contributors to the Lim and Herrera-Sobek book, in contrast, tend to suggest more hard-hitting solutions, such as drastically altering the tenure and promotion criteria and procedures and forming academic unions. Or they suggest strategies that make productive use of the multiple subject positions that characterize most women and minorities. Martin wants to reclaim our feminist past; the contributors to the Lim and Herrera-Sobek book want to look ahead and develop new hybrid methods, theories, and strategies that link feminism to other revolutionary movements that attend to class and racial oppression as well.

Neither book focuses on the field of composition studies, though two of the contributors to *Power, Race, and Gender in Academe* (Bramen and Hwang) do mention it in passing. Both books, however, are directly pertinent to our concerns. Martin devotes considerable attention to the devaluation of the field of education in the academy. She says, “The academy’s devaluation of the social institution and practice of education is incontrovertible.” What is especially devalued, she explains, is early childhood education and schooling, both of which are denigrated in the way home economics and nursing are. Her discussion of the struggles of the field of education to gain legitimacy within the academy parallels discussions within composition studies of the feminization of the field and the difficulties it has faced within English departments and the academy as a whole to gain acceptance given its emphasis on pedagogy and on student writing. Bramen’s discussion of the problem of part-time and nontenure-track faculty in *Power, Race, and Gender in Academe* parallels our own concerns given that the hiring of part-time and nontenure-track faculty is widespread within composition studies. Both books remind us that women and minorities are still struggling to find a comfortable place within the academy as a whole, as they are in the field of composition studies.

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Finding Voice in English Studies

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I was a journalism major and then a “hard news” journalist. I became a graduate student in English primarily because there was no master’s degree program in journalism in Tulsa when I began to study. “Voice” was one thing I could never get right. Unlike my fellow graduate students, I had not been force-fed E.B. White and the essayist ethos. If it weren’t for the eight or nine years that I spent making my living by writing, I might have gotten the idea that I couldn’t write. As it was, I merely felt half a bubble off on the intellectual level. The point of this anecdote is that I am no fan of “voice” pedagogies; still, I find myself drawn to theories that hint at the linguistic surplus we never acknowledged in J-school.

Perhaps that’s why I was intrigued by the apparent contradiction produced by reading Ruth Salvaggio’s *The Sounds of Feminist Theory* alongside Darsie Bowden’s *The Mythology of Voice*. When they are rubbed together, they produce enough friction to start a small forest fire. Salvaggio listens to the sounds of a residual oral language in critical writing; Bowden eviscerates the metaphor of voice in composition pedagogy. Both are similarly social in orientation, yet they part ways in their different purposes: Bowden is concerned with how emphasis on authentic personal voice in writing keeps students from learning traditional academic prose, while Salvaggio is interested in how listening for sound in writing can disrupt and liberate traditional critical writing.

What possible relationship(s) can there be between a book in the field of rhetoric and composition that critiques the metaphor of voice in writing pedagogy and a book in feminist literary studies that critiques and essentially rearticulates *écriture féminine* in feminist critical writing? These are two books from two different areas of English studies, addressing two very different problems; perhaps they have no business being considered together in one review. At the same time, both books address similar problematics and critique the concept of voice in writing. Both concern themselves with issues centering on the professional discourses of their respective fields. Both tease out some of the practical implications of earlier poststructuralist and later postmodern theories in English studies, such as Derrida’s critique of the metaphysics of presence or Anzaldúa’s discussion of “borderlands.” The difference is that Bowden rejects the concept of voice (almost) absolutely because it “epitomizes a