Book Reviews

Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia.
Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, Yolanda Flores Niemann Carmen G. González, and Angela Harris, Editors
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Reviewed by Vannina Sztainbok
Department of Social Justice Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Presumed Incompetent: *The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* is a testament to how white supremacy structures academic institutions. Over thirty women of colour (WOC) faculty, located in the US (and one in Canada), contributed to this volume. Through the critical analyses of their own experiences, interviews, and literature reviews they contribute to a growing literature on race and gender in academia, establishing that that their experiences of racism are not isolated but systemic. By taking an intersectional lens, this book shows how racism is enacted in gendered ways and how class positions many WOC faculty marginally in a culture where entitlement, material stability, and cultural capital proffer unacknowledged advantages. The book is organized into five sections: General Campus Climate, Faculty/Student Relationships, Networks of Allies, Social Class in Academia, and Tenure and Promotion. It will be a useful resource for anyone – faculty, administrators, policy-makers, students – who is interested in making the academy a more equitable space. The engaging first-hand accounts will also be of interest to readers outside the academy who want to deepen their understanding of institutional racism and the possibilities for change.

I expect that the stories contained in these pages will resonate for many women of colour faculty: having administrators side with student complaints; having your scholarship questioned; facing heavier workloads than your peers; being isolated from other faculty; facing hostile tenure committees; and being considered the "equity hire." The title refers to a recurring theme. While all of the authors have had to outshine their white, middle-class colleagues to attain their positions, they

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are at some point found lacking. As the editors state "the culture of academia is distinctly white, heterosexual, and middle- and upper-middle-class. Those who differ from this norm find themselves… 'presumed incompetent'" (Harris and González, p. 3). Yet, white faculty and even allies, often underestimate the relentlessness of racism. As I was writing the review, the urgency of this volume was sharpened. A colleague at another Canadian university, hired seven years ago based on her brilliant thesis, research, and publishing record, was asked by her dean whether she had finished her Ph.D. yet. Presumed Incompetent helps us to link these micro-aggressions of "everyday racism" to their historical, ideological and structural underpinnings.

The racial and gendered stereotypes that shape WOC experiences are foregrounded by Angela Mae Kupenda ("Facing Down the Spooks", chapter one) and Sherre Wilson ("They Forgot Mammy Had a Brain", chapter five). Kupenda and Wilson draw attention to the nurturing expectations placed on black women academics, who are haunted by the "be my mammy ghost" (Kupenda, p. 23). They are expected to step in as expert teachers, mentors and nurturers at the expense of their own professional and personal lives. For instance, Kupenda was asked to teach a summer course, while other faculty took research leaves, because of her "superior" teaching skills. When she refused, her dean's response shockingly invoked the mammy stereotype: "We need you to teach in the summer program because you are black, you are a woman, you are a great teacher, and you nurture, mother, feed, and nurse all the students" (Kupenda, p. 23).

Refusing heavier workloads usually comes at a cost to the women themselves or to others. For instance, Michelle M. Jacob ("Native Women Maintaining Their Culture in the White Academy, chapter 16), who interviewed five Native women faculty, describes the difficulty of their positioning: If they don't do the mentoring work, the students will suffer. They face "going along with the exploitative conditions and doing what needs to be done, or resisting exploitation and watching Native students and community needs to unmet" (Jacob, p. 245). Jacob's study concludes with recommendations for change. She calls for continued collective discussion and action on challenges faced by Native scholars, a continued commitment to Native values, collective advocacy, focus on the future generations, and continuing to publicly name the barriers facing Indigenous faculty in the academy.

Several authors connect increased demands to neoliberal policies, which unevenly download work to WOC faculty. Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo (chapter three) discusses how the presumed servile and "hot" Latina body is positioned within the consumer mind-set of many university students. In conjunction with racial and gender stereotypes, "market-place ideologies" entrench the sense of women of colour as providers of commodified services. They are there to nurture, serve and entertain, thus her title, " A Prostitute, a Servant, and a Customer-Service Representative." As Lugo-Lugo (p. 49) points out, the neoliberal university is complicit in this scenario: "it would be just a tad

easier to be able to talk to students about race relations, racial inequality, and racism without having to contend with an institution that puts a price tag on me, my class, and my lectures."

The student evaluation, a hallmark of the commodification of teaching, is put under the microscope by Sylvia R. Lazos ("Are Student Teaching Evaluations Holding Back Women and Minorities?," chapter twelve). Her comprehensive review of research on student evaluations seriously questions the reliability of this tool. She shows that student evaluations correlate highly with "likeability" measures. Students evaluate instructors based on factors such as charisma, warmth, and their perception of doing well in a class. Lazos points out that likeability often entails whiteness: being "likeable" is dependent upon making white students feel at ease. "For women instructors to be well recommended in student evaluations, they must live up to the female –stereotyped expectations that they should be warm, friendly, and supportive inside and outside the classroom and have good interpersonal skills (Kierstead et al. 1988, in Lazos, p. 180). Lazo's findings are supported by the accounts of faculty/student interactions that run throughout the book: the hostility from white students when WOC teach race-related material, WOC faculty being disciplined for racism, expectations that WOC should be nurturing, and students being dismissive of low grades received from WOC faculty.

Faculty culture is named as oppressive by many of the contributors. Constance G. Anthony ("The Port Hueneme of My Mind: The Geography of Working-Class Consciousness in One Academic Career", chapter 21) explains that while her colleagues could accept her coming out as gay, they could not hear her class-based critiques of campus culture. Anthony acknowledges that homophobia is, of course, still a problem. But, she was astounded that her colleagues refused to acknowledge any mention of the academy's elitist culture. In fact, her working-class status was often denied due to her position as an academic. In a society where "it is so socially unacceptable to be working-class….the academy encourages you to see yourself in every way as part of the privileged world that you have now joined" (Anthony, p. 306). The implications of Anthony's working-class origins were erased. In addition to struggling financially to get through grad school, she did not share her colleagues' sense of comfort and entitlement within academic circles. And, as she states, being a working-class academic continues to present material and social challenges. Crucially, Anthony (p. 312) advocates resisting the "academy's siren call" to elitism: "If you do not reject your working-class origins, changing the world will be as, if not more, important than becoming a success in your field."

The importance of allies was highlighted by several authors. Margalynne J. Armstrong and Stephanie M. Wildman explore how friendships across racial lines can contribute to anti-racism if white faculty draw on their privilege to strategize and support their WOC colleagues ("Working across Racial Lines in a Not-so-Post-Racial World, chapter 15). I found it

particularly useful that they provide a step-by-step example of how a group of women law faculty (white and of colour) worked together to help a colleague navigate the tenure process. The authors point out that these coalitions require effort and strategy since there are institutional barriers to cross-racial relationships and the voices of white faculty who work across racial lines may be devalued by the institution. Armstrong and Wildman (p. 241) conclude that these relationships are mutually enriching: "Both individuals contribute to a culture of democratic inclusion that has ramifications beyond the personal richness of their relationship."

Delia D. Douglas' contribution ("Black/Out: The White Face of Multiculturalism and the Violence of the Canadian Academic Imperial Project," chapter four) contests the myth of Canadian academia's "innocence," showing that the institution has budged little since the earlier critiques made by Bannerji (1996), Dua and Lawrence (2000), Ng (1993), and others. In Canada, as Douglas points out, white women have been the primary beneficiaries of equity policies within the university. Tellingly, the academy is often defended through reference to the US context: "it is widely believed that if you encounter racism, it is not as bad as what is happening south of the border" (Douglas, p. 53). This chapter elucidates how structural and ideological factors support the everyday violence faced by WOC faculty. Students who complain about faculty of colour are backed up by administrators. As a black woman, she faces hostility when tackling themes of racial hierarchy in the class. Yet, students' aggressive responses are regarded as having "nothing to do with race" and the administrators end up backing the student (Douglas, p. 57). "I contend that the white student's revulsion toward me was transformed into my so-called hatred of 'them'" (Douglas, p. 57) Douglas also faces the myth that faculty of colour will be favoured by affirmative action policies, despite the fact that she remains precariously employed. Lastly, Douglas points to how racial hierarchy reproduces itself: "the absence of diversity in academia suggests that people who look like me do not belong; students and faculty are being socialized through the exclusion of a range of voices, experiences, and perspectives, and this further reduces their opportunity to interact with marginalized or underrepresented groups" (p. 59).

At 570 pages, *Presumed Incompetent* should ring alarm bells. Yet, this is just the tip of the iceberg. The editors indicate that many more women wrote to them explaining why they could not contribute. Their reasons included fear of retaliation, fear of "outing" others, fear of triggering further pain, and fear of being branded as "anti-intellectual." One of the most troubling insights is that racial hierarchy is so deeply embedded that "where faculty of color have achieved critical mass, women faculty of color reported the internalization of long-standing societal norms has simply reconfigured the racial and gender hierarchy, rather than eliminating it" (Harris and González, p. 12). It is notable that, despite the hardships, the women in

these pages are not giving up. They are committed to the idea that their presence matters, that collective action needs to continue, that allies are necessary, and most of all, that women of colour can transform the academy. Although, as the editors note, sheer numbers are not enough, they do not give up on the importance of being represented in academia. They demand that all faculty and academic institutions commit to the task of identifying and undoing structures of dominance. I will end with the words of Harris and González (p. 10): "These essays are also filled with the hope and faith that solidarity among women faculty of color and their allies will ease the way for the next generation of academics."

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