# Disappearing Feminists: Removing Critical Voices from Academe

Jennifer L. Martin**,** Assistant Professor in the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Illinois at Springfield and Jane A. Beese**,** Associate Professor in the Educational Foundations, Research, Technology and Leadership Department, Youngstown State University

**Abstract**

This paper utilizes feminist standpoint theory to interrogate the personal oppressions and open hostilities that critical social justice intersectional feminists can face in academe. Looking specifically at academic mobbing, or tactical maneuvers used to discipline and/or punish successful scholars, particularly those possessing critical perspectives, and woman-to-woman bullying, we interweave narrative compiled through personal interviews with theory. We found that bullying and harassment are not uncommon for professors who are women, particularly if they are outspoken, critical, interested in justice and fairness—seeking it for themselves and others. These experiences are compounded by multiple minority statuses such as race, sexual orientation, and language prejudice. The paper concludes with strategies to help novice critical scholars navigate issues such as academic mobbing and bullying in order to combat the practices of exclusion that are ever present within higher education.

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*When women use bullying as a way of interacting with other women, they become complicit in reproducing systems that oppress women, further marginalizing themselves and other females. Each act of bullying marks targets (i.e., women) as deserving of abuse and disrespect*—Lutkin-Sandvik & Dickenson, 2012

### Introduction

 For nearly two decades, women have reached higher educational attainment levels than men, earning more than 50% of all bachelor, master's, and doctoral degrees; however, a disproportionate number of women to men hold positions of high faculty rank (Johnson, 2016).  In 2013, women held 49.2% of faculty positions, an increase of 10.6% since 1993, but only 37.6% of those positions were tenured (Finkelstein, Conley, & Schuster, 2016). According to Johnson, "In 2015, male faculty members held a higher percentage of tenure positions at every type of institution even though they did not hold the highest number of faculty positions at every rank" (2016, p. 7). In fact, the proportion of women faculty who are tenured or on the tenure track has declined from 20% to 8% between the years 1993 and 2013, while, simultaneously part-time appointments for women increased from 48% to 56% (Finkelstein et al., 2016). Less than 9% of women faculty have achieved full professorships (Finkelstein et al., 2016). Institutions of higher education are hiring more women, but most in adjunct positions—not for the more prestigious tenure track positions (Flaherty, 2016).

Women of all races and ethnicities will more than likely hold lower level faculty positions than men, but it is the persistent marginalization of women of color in higher education that makes the situation even more dire (Curtis, 2011, 2015; Finkelstein, et al., 2016; Johnson, 2016; Turner, Gonzales, & Wong, 2011). According to Finkelstein, Conley, and Schuster,

". . . white women have actually benefitted the least among all racial subgroups of women. Relative to the 109.7% increase in women faculty between 1993 and 2013, white women increased by 81.5% compared to the 296.0% increase in Asian-American women, and the 189.9% increase in underrepresented minority women (with Hispanic women outpacing both African-American and Native- Americans)" (2016, p. 13). However, the proportionate presence of underrepresented minority female faculty among all women faculty has remained dormant: Asian-American women full-time faculty increased 4.0%, and among both tenure track and tenured female faculty 6.3%; African-American women full-time faculty increased 0.3%, among tenure track female faculty 0.5%, and tenured female faculty declined 0.5%; Latino women full-time faculty increased 1.4%, among tenure-track female faculty 1.5%, and tenured female faculty 1.3%; Native American women full-time faculty increased 0.1%, no change in tenure track female faculty, and tenured female faculty 0.2% (Finkelstein et al., 2016). Although the gap appears to be narrowing, the numbers of minority women remain relatively small.

Underrepresented minority groups hold 13% of faculty jobs but only 10% of tenure track/tenured positions (Finkelstein et al., 2016). Underrepresented minority women of color often outnumber men of color in lower-ranking faculty positions, ". . . but men of color hold full professor positions more often than women of color" (Johnson, 2016, p. 5). While we have seen tremendous growth in the past twenty years, nearly triple in number—from 35,800 to 103,800, of underrepresented minority women faculty, the growth in tenure-track positions has been modest—from 7,900 to 14,300 (Feinstein et al., 2016). The advancement of underrepresented minority women to full-time

tenure positions has been limited with most of the growth at the level of full-time non-tenure-track appointments and part-time appointments (Finkelstein et al., 2016).

At the intersection of race and gender, the increasing stratification of faculty levels place gains women and underrepresented minority women have made in positions of part-time adjuncts and full-time non-tenured track faculty (Flaherty, 2016). According to Finkelstein et al., (2016), "The available jobs tend, less and less, to be the conventional 'good' jobs, that is, the tenure-track career-ladder jobs that provide benefits, manageable to quite good salaries, continued professional development opportunities—and, crucially, a viable future for academics" (p. 1).

**Purpose**

This paper details some experiences of intersectional feminist professors who, because of this standpoint, possess an outsider status (i.e., outsiders inherently critique institutional practices that perpetuate racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, classist, and other –isms which serve to perpetuate the status quo), which subjects them to chilly climates within their respective institutions. Overt and covert exclusion, gendered microaggressions, and gaslighting are just some of their experiences. In this paper, we analyze not only the impact of these experiences on the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental health of participants but also how these experiences have impacted and informed their work.

**Theoretical Framework**

Feminist standpoint theory (Sprague 2016) informs this work, which demands an analysis of how power and authority interact. Power is a part of all social relations and is directly related to the ability to work in concert or collaboration with one another (Nyberg, 1981). Foucault's analysis of power counterbalances standpoint theory, extracting meaning from how exchanges of power within the university serve to maintain the status quo, which is highly racialized and gendered, and used to punish those who question it, or perform in ways that upset status quo expectations based upon gender, race, sexuality, class, and other marginalized identities. As Foucault states, "Generally speaking, all the authorities exercising individual control function according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding (made/same; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal); and that of coercive assignment, of differential distribution (who he is; where he must be; how he is to be characterized; how he is to be recognized; how a constant surveillance is to be exercised over him in an individual way, etc.)" (p. 199).

Foucault's concepts of surveillance and the gaze play out within notions of what is acceptable/unacceptable behavior for feminist scholars, and Foucault's notion of power reproduces this limiting binary. The Foucauldian representation of Bentham's panopticon is realized in our current milieu through the self-policing of women, e.g., "the Hillary Problem": hyper-confident women are neither palatable nor acceptable, for they defy the outdated yet still perpetuated gender stereotype that women should demur to men, to the system, to tradition, to the institution. As Foucault argues, the Panopticon "reverses" the function of the dungeon, focusing only on "enclosure"; the other two functions: depriving light and hiding the prisoner, are no longer necessary. In this metaphorical prison, women police themselves, a requirement of the panopticon, "[Sh]e is seen, but [s]he does not see; [s]he is the object of information, never a subject in

communication" (p. 200). Likewise, women are kept separate, and compete against one another—the panopticon becomes a metaphor for power and control: self-policing: ". . . to induce. . . a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (p. 201).

Foucault's "central tower," where ". . . one sees everything without ever being seen" is an invisible metaphorical entity, situated to control our every action and decision, with the ultimate goal of holding us in compliance, never to challenge the status quo (p. 202); those who do become destabilized. Those who challenge the status quo, by, for example, questioning sexist institutional practices that serve to keep women silent, per gendered stereotypes for example, are summarily punished. Stereotypes and discrimination have largely not changed for women in academe in the last 30 years. Thus, we utilize Foucault's concept of surveillance and power to theorize the ways in which women in the academy are: stereotyped, self-policed, and (may benefit from) policing other women.

Shame resilience theory is another layer that informs this analysis. According to Brown (2006):

> The definition of *shame* that emerged from the research is, "An intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging." Participants described shame using terms including *devastating*, *noxious*, *consuming*, *excruciating*, *filleted*, *small*, *separate from others*, *rejected*, *diminished,* and *the worst feeling ever*. In defining shame, participants contrasted shame with *guilt*, which they defined or described as a feeling that results from *behaving* in a flawed or bad way rather than a flawed or bad *self.* (p. 45)

Institutions possess mechanisms of control that serve to shame those who do fit within pre-existing hegemonic expectations/categories. These shaming practices serve to silence and isolate their victims, continuing to make these mechanisms of control hidden and continuing practices.

We will elucidate what Brown terms "speaking shame." Through this work, we become vulnerable, critically aware, and empathic, according to Brown, all necessary components to building resilience to shame. We build upon this theory, by expanding it to method, as well as applying it to practice, as we devise strategies to combat to transgress/"talk back" to institutional oppressions.

**Review of the Literature**

Power may be illusive for women in the workplace. Women cannot break into important jobs unless they are self-promoting, confident, and advocate for themselves, but self-promotion can be a double edged sword; while it increases how a woman is perceived i.e., with confidence and/or competence, it decreases social attraction where ". . . woman can be discriminated against for failing to counteract gender stereotypes (i.e., for acting 'as a woman') and discriminated against for counteracting gender stereotypes (i.e., for not acting 'as a woman should')" (Rudman, 1998, p. 643). Women in academe, particularly if they identify as feminist scholars, may meet with disastrous consequences ". . . women who are self-promoting or otherwise outside female social norms" (Lewin, 2002, para. 4), can be "disappeared,": denied tenure and promotion, formally sanctioned, and otherwise betrayed by the institution, for perceived lack of "collegiality."

According to Grigoryan (2017), women in academe who excel and do not apologize for it, often receive negative consequences. Subservience and silence are still expectations for women in academe despite decades of feminist progress. The expectations that women be "nice" and apologize in order to self-efface so as not to offend, are not uncommon. Feminist academics, especially when they out produce their male and non-feminist women peers, can be labeled as "uppity," or not "fitting in" (Lewin, 2002). Such self-promoting, outspoken, and productive feminist scholars are often controlled, demeaned, and dismissed via tactics of mobbing, gaslighting, and subtle forms of bullying.

**The Plight of the Feminist Scholar**

Critical intersectional feminist scholars make a point of "decentering whiteness": in their teaching, in their scholarship, in their activism, and in their advocacy for students and for change within their respective institutions. According to Cooper (2017):

> We simply must acknowledge that academic inquiry is absolutely capable of doing harm. Whole bodies of scholarship argued that women were a weaker gender, properly subject to the rule of men. The history of Western thought and science is predicated on the argument that African and indigenous peoples are inferior races. None of the questions that researchers ask issue from value-neutral terrain and because the American landscape is so deeply tethered to notions that whiteness (and maleness) are neutral, objective, superior, then often the kinds of debates that academics want to have are intrinsically harmful. If there is anything objective that we can say, it is that. (para. 23)

Critical intersectional feminist scholars make inherent institutional critiques, through their curriculum, their advocacy, and their very presence within academe. Despite institutional calls to embrace diversity and diverse faculty, those who actually embody this face severe consequences for their very presence. Some of those consequences and tactics include academic mobbing and bullying.

Feminist thought and action is often demonized, and feminist academics who implicitly or explicitly communicate a feminist orientation, by, for example, critiquing and/or dismantling workplace inequities, may have to work all that much harder to be taken seriously. According to Kozma and Weekes Schroer (2017), "A tremendous amount of feminist energy is directed toward explaining feminist critiques and justifying feminist and principles" (p. 85).

The feminist scholar can receive consequences from without because their activist orientation, or confident nature does not fit the mold of what is expected of women. According to Grigoryan (2017):

> I recognized that I had been naïve in assuming that I could act "normal," act in what I considered a gender-neutral way without pandering to outdated gender expectations of female niceness (as in smiling a lot), friendliness (engaging in frequent small talk, showing interest with a nurturing attitude, giving compliments, smiling some more), accommodation (completing office housework, accepting classes and schedules rejected by male colleagues), helpfulness (not saying no, *ever*), and be accepted and treated fairly and equally to that of my male colleagues or females who did engage in stereotypically female behaviors. Hence, the same feminist values that empower us on a personal level can disempower us on a practical or materialistic level. (p. 246)

Thus, many feminist academics are not safe in just being ourselves; we have to check ourselves to ensure we are fitting the mold of what others expect (self-policing).

**Academic Mobbing**

A lesser known type of bullying and harassment, academic mobbing involves the social exclusion of an individual considered to be an "outsider" within an academic department. Often those academics who are mobbed are highly accomplished, and their colleagues fear being "overshadowed" by accomplishments that will reveal their own inadequacies (Gorlewski, Gorlewski, & Porfilio, 2014).

> Defined by Khoo (2010), academic mobbing consists of:
> . . . a non-violent, sophisticated, "ganging up" behaviour adopted by academicians to "wear and tear" a colleague down emotionally through unjustified accusation, humiliation, general harassment and emotional abuse. These are directed at the target under a veil of lies and justifications so that they are "hidden" to others and difficult to prove (p. 61).

Theorizing the phenomenon of mobbing, it is those individuals who threaten to upset the status quo within their departments, by achieving more, expecting more, or questioning outdated or unethical practices, that are often targeted for mobbing. Very often, the victim does not understand what is happening until they find themselves embedded in very precarious situations, often with administrative sanctions, as the mob has implicitly, silently, and expertly laid the groundwork to destroy academic reputations through false accusations, humiliations, exaggerated weaknesses, etc.

According to Khoo (2010), "Bullies use mobbing activities to hide their own weaknesses and incompetence. Targets selected are often intelligent, innovative high achievers, with good integrity and principles. Mobbing activities appear trivial and innocuous on their own but the frequency and pattern of their occurrence over a long period of time indicates an aggressive manipulation to 'eliminate' the target" (p. 61). Khoo also argues that outspoken women faculty who address issues of inequity are often the targets of mobbing, as "Their competence and professional success are perceived as threats by the bullies" (p. 11). Essentially academic mobbing is a tool used as a weapon by perpetrators to "hide their own weaknesses" (Gorlewski, Gorlewski, & Porfilio, 2014, p. 15).

Mobbing is insidious because, taken in isolation, some of the events can be dismissed as trivial, meaningless, and the target, if outspoken about said treatment, can be subject to gaslighting, minimization, and trivialization. Highly accomplished and outspoken academics, particularly whose possessing minority/multi-minorities status(es), can become targets of academic mobbing because they force their colleagues, albeit unintentionally, to look at themselves, to acknowledge their own inadequacies, and to act in retaliation. They thus begin to spin a false narrative about the accomplished target/colleague: framing the target as unreasonable, angry, arrogant, and the like. This false narrative can then become the reality, especially if the target does not yet realize the subtle and behind the back attacks being leveled against her. She then is forced to compensate when and if she does realize what is occurring, thus taking her away from her work: her teaching, her research, her service.

**Bullying: Woman-to-Woman**

Sepler (2017) discusses the "quiet" bully: the bully who operates behind closed doors, which ". . . involves the small 'p' politics of vilification. It is largely, but not exclusively, the province of women, and in academia it is particularly ferocious" (p. 296). This bullying, involves "gender policing—pressure to conform to gender stereotyping" (p. 296). This type of bullying can also be considered "indirect aggression" because behavior is perpetrated upon the victim in order to cause them harm, without readily identifying the perpetrator as an aggressor. In fact, the victim often does not realize what is happening, subtle sabotage, until it is too late, and the damage has been done.

> According to Sepler (2017):
> Being "aggressive" is viewed askance and outside the expectation that girls will be empathetic, supportive, and collaborative. . . The mean girls have learned that conforming to gender stereotypes is important. "Aggression" by girls is tied to the implicitly sexist but very real prospect of "unlikeability. . ." Mean girls learn that relational aggression is a powerful tool to keep themselves in control of their destiny while never appearing to challenge male power (p. 297).

In a 2011 survey of 1,000 women in the U.S. workforce stated that 95% reported being undermined by another woman (Sepler, 2017). According to Sepler (2017) the following are the most common tactics of quiet bullies:

- Planting false or partially false narratives about targets;
- Damning with faint praise—offering a compliment, and quickly dialing it back with a statement of deficit;
- Using others to lodge complaints about the target;
- Demonstrating apparent care and concern to build trust and then taking advantage of trust to embarrass or humiliate the target by sharing information provided under the guise of "friendship" or mentoring;
- Gaslighting: telling a target that the target has made an error or insulting the target, then denying that they have done or said what they did or said;
- Refusal to engage, avoiding, or shunning;
- Moving the goalposts: stating objectives or benchmarks only to have them change when the target reaches them;
- Shunning or ostracizing the target;
- Recommending that others complain about the target (p. 298).

**Queen Bee**

The Queen Bee Syndrome, coined in the 1970s by Staines, Tavris, and Jayaratne (1974), pertains to women in positions of authority who disassociate from other women, and even undermine other women, because they understand that there is precious little room for advancement for women. This is a decidedly anti-feminist position. The queen bee is an alpha female who does not abide other alpha females (Allen & Flood, 2018). As Allen and Flood state, "Far from nurturing the growth of younger female talent, queen bees push aside possible competitors by chipping away at their self-confidence or undermining their professional standing. . . " (p. 12). Derks, Ellemers, van Laar, and de Groot (2011) were able to identify the ways "queen bees" develop and emerge in a

competitive work environment—the Queen Bee phenomenon was found among women who had made big sacrifices for their careers, experienced high levels of discrimination on their way up the ladder, and started their careers with low feminine gender expression, often describing themselves as more "masculine." These women learned that to survive in their organizations, they often had to disassociate themselves from other women, which then perpetuated the gender discrimination inherent in their organizations (Derks, Ellemers, van Laar, & de Groot, 2011).

**Methods, Data Collection, and Analysis**

This study was a pilot study using convenience sampling for the purpose of examining research processes and analyses. Further research based on this pilot will include additional participants with more sophisticated sampling.

In this pilot narrative analysis of the lives of women in academe, we use stories as data or first-person accounts of experiences lived while working in faculty positions in higher education. Stories are powerful meaning-making tools related to ordering experiences and making sense of human behaviors (Brunner, 1991; Lyotard, 1984; Merriam, 2002). The researcher's role in narrative analysis is one of storyteller, Mishler explains, ". . . we retell our respondents' accounts through our analytic redescriptions. We, too, are storytellers and through our concepts and methods—our research strategies, data samples, transcription procedures, specifications of narrative units and structures, and interpretive perspectives—we construct the story and its meaning" (1995, p. 117). The narrative method contributes intensity and authenticity in the stories we tell (Bamberg, 2012; McAdams, 1993; Randall, 1995).

This is a study of the experiences of women in academe, including intersectional feminists, who have been exposed to hostile treatment, bullying, and harassment, and have faced unfair sanctions and consequences. The following research questions were used in the study on the lived experiences for women in academe:

1. How do women faculty, specifically critical feminist intersectional scholars, describe their experiences with exclusion, workplace inequities, and institutional bias in academe?
2. How does working in academe change these women's lives?
3. What advice or lessons learned can these women provide others?

Participants

We used convenience sampling to select women participants. Our criterion was that participants had endured, encountered, and survived bullying and harassment in the higher education, and had a story to tell. Invitation forms included details pertaining to the interview process, in addition to the potential risks and benefits of participating in the research study. All names have been changed to protect participant anonymity. In addition, some participant stories are collapsed into one, or expanded into several participant narratives to obscure authorship, and to further protect anonymity.

Data Collection

We gathered narrative accounts using qualitative open-ended and unstructured interviewing techniques. Participants were prepared ahead of time by providing information on our topics of interest. Prompts such as, "go on," "can you tell me more about that?" "describe that," etc., will be used to elicit more of the story and follow-up questions asked after participants' finished telling their stories.

We utilized two sources of data in this analysis:
1. Some scholars wrote their own "standpoints," focusing on our own struggles with finding fit within academe in lieu of the interview process.
2. We interviewed faculty members from various types of institutions to glean their evaluations of workplace inequities and institutional bias.

An informed consent form was collected for all participants that stated that they should only share information they were comfortable sharing.

Data Analysis

We incorporated Saldana's (2016) method of *process coding* to analyze the data. Process coding involves highlighting gerunds within the data in order to connote observable and conceptual action. It is an action-oriented method. We selected this method based upon the tension women face between the active and passive gendered stereotypes of women in positions of relative power. We selected this method of analysis because bullying and mobbing tends to have a silencing effect on the target. We sought to determine if we would find the same silencing with our participants.

**Findings**

The following excepts have been extracted from the interview transcripts of participant's experiences that highlight specific strategies and tactics of bullying and harassing behaviors. Each excerpt is analyzed separately and then the common themes are discussed.

**Suzette**

Call it naïveté, but I am constantly surprised by the fact that someone who studies microaggressions and harassment would be consistently subjected to these behaviors in an institution of higher learning. My personality, and who I am as a person, has never been so critiqued as it has during my five years at a private predominantly white institution (PPWI). And, although I am white and a recipient of all of the privileges that whiteness entails, I have faced other consequences for my identity because I do not possess a "goodness of fit." As an open feminist, an advocate for educational equity for various marginalized populations within the school districts surrounding my PPWI, specifically, racial, economic, and sexual minorities, as well as within my own institution, I have been labeled "abrasive," "mean," and insufficiently "nice." My critical lens has not been openly embraced, and my intersectional feminist worldview has been delegitimized in various ways. This work, my writing, is the only thing that keeps me sane, while also simultaneously making me vulnerable. My questioning voice, which I thought would be embraced in the hallowed halls of higher education, was almost immediately suppressed; I was informally told that I needed to "know my place," and to "silence my voice," and formally sanctioned for not

so doing. Who did I think I was questioning the status quo as a lowly assistant professor? I thought I was doing the right thing as a scholar. I quickly learned that I was wrong.

**Analysis of Suzette's Story**

In theorizing, again, the *type* of woman one *is* matters. Foucault's concepts of surveillance and the gaze inform us that is acceptable/unacceptable behavior for women academics. Foucault's notion of power reproduces this limiting binary. Foucault's explication of Bentham's conception of the panopticon is realized in our current milieu through the self-policing of women; we are all socialized into compliance. Those who challenge the status quo, by, for example, questioning racist, sexist, and homophobic institutional practices that serve to keep outsiders silent, are summarily punished.

New university hires are often told by their mentors to "not make waves." But, at the same time, how can one trained in the traditions of critical pedagogy not speak out when grave injustices are being perpetrated every day, both at the university and within surrounding K-12 classrooms? Upsetting the apple cart is why we choose to work in higher education, is it not? These complexities are exacerbated by the fact that Suzette's university is geographically located in the small town rural mid-west, where the culture of niceness is real (Pittard and Butler, 2008).

> Pittard and Butler (2008), define the "culture of niceness" as:
> . . . school culture (including external factors such as school structure, community culture and nature of the profession in general) characterized by conformity and professional interactions wherein the expectation for teachers is to not be confrontational or critical of the school structure, but to accept it or at the very least to work within it without outward resistance. In other words, the expectation is for teachers to "play nice" within the system of schooling, accepting the status quo and modeling it for their students. We see this as part of the "hidden curriculum" of schools and, as such, it is pervasive and invisible at times (p. 72).
> The expectation within this culture of niceness is that everyone smile, be pleasant, and not

broach any controversial issues, or issues that make others (read white) feel uncomfortable. The reality of this "niceness" is more sinister, yet more implicit. When the surface is scratched, and the thin veneer of niceness is explored, what lies beneath is less than kind. The outspoken receive consequences, but not explicitly. The outspoken may never know, at least not immediately, that anyone has a problem with their questioning; rather, their punishment comes via chilly receptions from colleagues, behind-the-back retaliation, and/or assaults on their reputations through gossip, through insinuation, and even through hyperbole and fabricated assessments of their work, their collegiality, and their overall value to the institution. The culture of hazing that impacts many new professors, e.g., inequitable workloads, threats of sanction for non-compliance, and retaliation, is real.

To aggravate the resulting culture of fear and instability on the part of novice professors, stemming from this culture of hazing, whistleblowers, those who report workplace inequities and harassment, can be perceived as the problem. This is a form of gaslighting where the victim is perceived as the cause of the problems, as the problems may be private—and unknown to others within that respective culture. The perception that one is being "confrontational" or "critical," even when reporting one's own harassment, serves to attempt to keep the whistleblower in their place.

Suzette's outsider status forced her to spend much of her time defending herself: writing letters of rebuttal to "anonymous complaints" from students of which she still questions the veracity, critiques of her personality, (e.g., being plain spoken, or blunt), and the questioning of her skills (e.g., needs to improve her "soft skills"). These were all implicit attacks on her gender expression, as outspoken women (read feminist) are not welcomed within her current institutional home. She could have better spent her time working on lessons, research, etc. Instead, she sacrificed leisure time in order to compensate for saboteurs, which had a direct impact on her overall health. She felt the need to make herself "bullet-proof"—beyond reproach: doing more service, more publishing, and more everything, in order to compensate for her "non-compliant" persona. She watched as her uncomplicated colleagues sailed through the tenure process without fear, with no publications, with no national presence, engaging in no complicated questions or conversations. . . .

Suzette realized much later, that she was being academically "mobbed." She was "operating in the dark," to the subtle sabotage that she faced, as her first (male) chair attempted to get her fired based upon a false story that he created, to no avail. And her second (female) chair attempted to create a paper trail of teaching ineffectiveness based upon anonymous student comments, although student course evaluations revealed otherwise.

Victims of academic mobbing, Suzette included, face silencing; this was a prominent theme within the data. She felt humiliation and shame, and momentarily retreated. She eventually realized that this is exactly the goal of academic mobbing: for the target to "go away quietly," and not to speak about the injustices they have faced. Silence is also common for those peripherally surrounding the target, in terms of a lack of response from those who witness the mobbing and do nothing— for it is safer to do nothing.

**Helena**

The following words have been used to describe me: abrasive, pushy, opinionated, brash.
As a teacher educator, I was tasked with teaching a course in multicultural education in the first year that it became a departmental requirement—quite controversial in a midwestern PWI, especially for an untenured faculty member. Teaching diversity is unsafe for professors, often making students feel uncomfortable—particularly at a PWI. Research indicates that women professors in particular are often deemed as "opinionated," as opposed to experts in their field because they defy the traditional gender stereotypes of being caring, maternal, or even open to all student opinions, even when correction is warranted (Boring, 2015).

**Analysis of Helena's Story**

As a professor of Color, Helena was tasked with teaching the only diversity course required within the undergraduate curriculum. The fact that she was the faculty member tasked with doing so is problematic, particularly when her first year was the first year of this requirement. Compounded with this is the fact that minorities, e.g., faculty of color, women, women faculty of color, international faculty, faculty who speak with an accent, etc., receive lower course evaluations than their hegemonic colleagues, put Helena in a double bind. Her institution neither provided any

critique of student evaluations in general, nor did they provide any training for faculty or students on the history of bias within student evaluations of teaching.

For over one hundred years, academics have debated the validity of student course evaluations to determine teacher effectiveness (Murray, 2005). Countless studies have indicated the ineffectiveness of student evaluations of teaching (SET), yet institutions of higher education continue to use them to make high stakes decisions for faculty members, such as tenure and promotion decisions (Murray, 2005).

Boring, Ottoboni, and Stark (2016) found that student evaluations of teaching (SET), are biased against women professors, which impacts objective teaching characteristics such as how quickly assignments are graded. SETs are more impacted by gender bias and expectations for grades than for actual teaching effectiveness. The effect of gender bias is so great as to cause more effective professors to get lower course evaluations than less effective professors. In a study conducted by Clayson and Haley (2011), the researchers found that 80% of students had "knowingly given an instructor an *undeserved* evaluation for some reason" (p. 104). Some students may retaliate against their professors through SETs if their professors expect too much, or do not assign the grades that students expect; this is what Maslow (1966) deems the "screw you" effect.

**Olivia's Story**

The president said, "If you are not liked by colleagues in your own department, you should not get tenure." Some of Olivia's colleagues who were close to the president warned her to apply for other jobs, as she was disliked among some of her colleagues. Olivia worked at a public teaching institution, and was a highly productive scholar. She was evaluated by a chair with no publications, had won a national book award, and published over 30 book chapters, peer reviewed articles, and edited books prior to going up for tenure.

In fact, Olivia was the most published scholar in the history of the university. She had a national presence and did much service to the school and the community. After supporting her for tenure, promotion, and sabbatical, her female chair wrote a scathing letter rescinding her support of Olivia, alleging that students were afraid of her, critiquing the way she walked, and accusing her of being a bully. She further argued that she truly never supported Olivia for tenure, but rather she was afraid of Olivia thus justifying her previous "support." Olivia's chair also spoke *for* other department members indicating that these named people also felt that Olivia was a bully—again, without evidence.

**Analysis of Olivia's Story**

Olivia's story is perhaps the clearest example in this writing of institutional betrayal. Because her chair did not like her, or found her threatening, she worked to undermine and sabotage her. It should be here noted that Olivia was a very productive scholar at a public teaching institution; her chair had produced zero publications. "Likeability" should never trump productivity. However, this institution valued faculty compliance and loyalty more than they did academic prestige.

Olivia described feeling like a "criminal." Although she knew that she had done nothing wrong, she spent months barely functioning—living with the fact that her colleagues had done her intentional harm—behind the back, and never having to face any consequences for making false claims. She reported facing "situational depression": feeling hopeless, having trouble sleeping, lacking a desire to eat, etc. She stated that it was all she could do to teach her classes; she also experienced an "intellectual paralysis," unable to complete writing or research projects. She also reported that this was the worst thing she had ever experienced, and that this experience was the "lowest point in her life." She later learned that she had been characterized by some of her peers as "conceited, arrogant, and too self-promoting." She was also aware that white male colleagues who were denied tenure were "rallied around" by colleagues who sought to rectify just an institutional "betrayal." She witnessed several white males who were initially denied tenure and promotion be tenured and promoted quickly when their colleagues ran for the committees who made such decisions. Olivia did not experience such "justice." Instead, several of her books were stolen from a faculty display. She highly doubted that the perpetrators were students. Olivia elected to pull her tenure application, and move to another institution.

**Kienna's Story**

I teach in a doctoral program. Part of my responsibilities include shepherding students through the dissertation process. At first, I did not have any dissertation students assigned to me because the students had not had me in previous classes, and did not know me. Stacey asked me to serve as a committee member on two of her student dissertations and I agreed. I needed the experience, and I felt that Stacey was successfully working with a lot of students—I was eager to learn.

Stacey was self-promoting with students and with anyone who would listen. She also wanted all of the doctoral students in our program to choose to work with her as dissertation chair, and undermined other faculty to get them to comply. She would tell students, "You can't get through this program without me as your chair." She also told students she had a plan that she used to get them through quickly.

The first time I was able to read and review her students' work was at the proposal defense. I questioned the quality of the literature review, for it stated there was a lack of research on the topic, and I knew that was not the case. In front of the student and the rest of the committee Stacey told me that I did not know what I was talking about, and I just needed to sign off on the work. The second dissertation was in my area of expertise. Again, the student had written that there was very little research on the topic, and produced a very limited review of literature. I asked why the student had not looked at prominent research on the topic. Stacey immediately dismissed the researchers I had mentioned. Her rudeness to me and degradation of my abilities took place both in public and in private.

One day she came into my office and told me that she was sending me a dissertation student. I was excited to have a student to work with, but I had to ask why she was not keeping them for herself. She stated, "She will never finish so you can have her."

Years later, I amassed numerous dissertation students. At this time, Stacey had become chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at our institution. As my students worked on their proposals, we prepared their IRB applications. Stacey stopped them, held them up, delayed, stalled—anything she could do to prevent my students from completing the process. For example, the first student's IRB application was an exempt study that took eight months to receive approval. It took the next student 13 revisions, an investigation for misconduct, and a year and six months to gain approval. This was such a hardship on the students, and time consuming for me. I examined the average length of time for applications received IRB approval; it was nine days.

I attempted to get help with the problems I was having—working through many avenues without assistance. After two years, another investigator was assigned to the applications submitted by my students and me. Since then, every application has gone through in a timely manner—usually within one month from start to finish.

**Analysis of Kienna's Story**

Kienna's story demonstrates just how complicit institutions can be in the harassment of certain faculty members. Kienna had reported her experiences to multiple institutional mechanisms about Stacey's behavior, yet Stacey was allowed to continue her unprofessional and unethical conduct—effectively harming both faculty and students. Nothing was done. Instead, Kienna had to learn how to work with, and, more so, around Stacey. Such additional work, often attempting to preempt Stacey's sabotage was both exhausting and debilitating.

Kienna indicates that she never knew why she was targeted by Stacey. She can only theorize. She communicated that she wondered if Stacey desired to be the most popular professor, and when students sought her out as their dissertation chair, Stacey felt threatened and did her level best to ensure that Kienna's students never finished. Kienna's institution did nothing to protect her, despite being a unionized institution.

**Marlene's Story**

In graduate school, I was the only woman in my cohort. It was common for my peers to make sexist jokes; make comments like, "that test raped me"; or refer to women as "females." I called them out, and over time they have started to change their behavior—at least in front of me. Often the behaviors were seemingly innocuous. All but one of the men in my cohort were men of Color, but often failed to see how marginalized identities come in multiple forms. For a few of them, race and class we to be taken seriously—feminism was a joke.

My faculty advisor told me that I needed to get more serious about my research and writing, and not let family get in the way. A man in my cohort, who was advised by the same man and also took time away from research and writing to care for his family, never experienced this.

At a conference, I listened to a panel of women social scientists tell a group of doctoral students and junior faculty that they should consider masking their familial/ marital status (I was married and had two kids at the time). Some recommended: don't wear a ring, as it might indicate that you

will be unable to move (e.g., my partner's career was likely more important than mine) or I would never be committed to the job if I had kids' soccer games to attend.

In my second year on the tenure clock, my office was vandalized. Someone broke in and drew a small, but very conspicuous, penis on the inside wall of my office

That same year, I learned that another woman in my office had been (was being?) stalked by her former graduate student. He had been found "not guilty" of violating any policy during the Title IX hearing two years before. I found out because his advisor had demanded that he be given a special award to allow him to continue teaching, which required office hours and office space. Out of fear for her safety (and likely hurt for not being taken seriously) she moved her office out of the department, and I lost having a mentor and friend nearby.

At my very first faculty retreat as a brand new tenure track faculty member, I watched as a full professor interrupted the interim acting chair—a woman—over and over again. It was uncomfortable. I first thought it was a one-time thing, but I was wrong. He continued to do it at nearly all faculty meetings. We had to change our faculty handbook in order to change his behavior.

A full faculty member sent me multiple scathing emails that indirectly threatened my tenure, when I declined to have an "informal meeting over coffee" to discuss pressing departmental issues.

I have met with administration, the union, and peers to discuss the sexist climate in our department, taking up hours of my time that could be dedicated to research, writing, or teaching. In one instance, I met with the dean right before I had to teach. My mind was elsewhere and the class went horribly. I was angry with myself, until I realized that none of the men in the department— those perpetrating and perpetuating sexism—had to worry about this.

After removing myself from department activities for a few months, I decided to attend an after-work event. There was beer and bowling. I had previously called out the sexist climate in the department, and I was uncertain how my attendance would be received. Unfortunately, the same person who later sent me the email chain for declining coffee, was there and far too affectionate. To be clear, I was not assaulted or harassed, but I was uncomfortable by his nearly constant physical closeness to me—often reaching out to rub my arm. The whole thing made me feel creeped out.

In my experience this behavior is often perpetrated by men who see themselves as "progressives," "feminists," or "woke."

**Analysis of Marlene's Story**

As told by Marlene, she and her trusted confidants were shocked at her treatment at her historically liberal/progressive institution. Although she was hired as an open feminist, almost immediately her feminist sentiment and scholarship was minimized, dismissed, and she was framed as a "problem." Some supposed pro-feminist male colleagues participated in her exclusion, harassment, and discomfort, while others ignored it. She found no support from her male

colleagues, even those who purported to understand sexism and discrimination. It seems that her success and her research agenda threatened them, and they were unwilling to jeopardize their own success within academe to assist, mentor, or defend a junior and untenured faculty member.

## Overall Findings

Through our interviews with colleagues, we found three central themes:

1. Disappearing feminists: outspoken feminist professors were often "dismissed" from or intentionally harmed by their institutions who policed them because they made their peers look bad in comparison. Often, these peers were women or "queen bees," who understood that there was precious little room for women to succeed within academe.

2. Justification of non-dominant/outsider professors' dismissal: white cis-gender males and traditional female white cis-gender females with acritical/apolitical perspectives were threatened by critical scholars who critiqued inequitable institutional practices, perhaps because they had found success within the institution. For them to truly "see" the institutional problems, they would have to acknowledge their own privilege, and how they succeeded despite the institutional exclusion of others.

3. Outrage and ultimate resolution for hegemonic professors not making tenure:

We heard various accounts of white/hegemonic professors overturning tenure denials on appeal through the support of their colleagues. Additionally, we found that white/hegemonic professors justified the termination of critical intersectional feminist professors, citing their failure to meet some tenure category, of which they would not have specific knowledge. The few tenured professors of Color that we interviewed indicated that they were upset by the decisions to terminate various critical intersectional feminist professors, but were hesitant to speak up for fear of their own careers.

We found these similar themes in private PWIs, public PWIs, public liberal R1 institutions, etc. Unfortunately, we did not find many differences in the treatment of non-hegemonic professors in private versus public institutions, teaching versus research focused institutions, conservative versus liberal institutions, etc. The differences were in the tactics used: how flagrant versus implicit the harassment was, the status of the harasser, and the complicity of institutional practices to reward hegemonic professors and harm those with non-hegemonic, or critical/intersectional/feminist points of view. But, we found that the harassers did hold some form of institutional power, whether garnered upon accomplishment or not.

## Discussion

This paper reveals some of the hidden and insidious problems within academe. It is important to not only bring these problems to light, but also to provide novice scholars with strategies to combat these issues, particularly non-hegemonic faculty.

## Institutional Implications

Perhaps the most glaring finding in this analysis is this: faculty members who make decisions about continuation, tenure, and promotion should most assuredly be compelled to be trained in federal civil rights laws. In our data analysis, we found civil rights laws violated in almost all of the cases.

Second, institutions must make research based decisions about student evaluations of teaching (SET). According to Gorlewski, Gorlewski, and Porfilio (2014), ". . . the onus should be on universities that rely on SET for employment decisions to provide convincing affirmative evidence that such reliance does not have disparate impact on women, under-represented minorities, or other protected groups. Because the bias varies by course and institution, affirmative evidence needs to be specific to a given course in a given department in a given university. Absent such specific evidence, SET should not be used for personnel decisions" (p. 33).

**Survival Strategies**

We attempt to provide strategies for critical intersectional feminist scholars to navigate workplace inequities and institutional bias. The first strategy is awareness: know your rights, learn your faculty handbook, find your allies. Although one must stand up for what is right, and speak their truth to power, at the same time, maintaining composure is key. Although the appropriate response to harassment is anger, women's anger, however justified, is often misinterpreted as something else (Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1990).

The second strategy is professional demeanor. When confronted with a negative issue, try to avoid getting emotional. Although this is unfortunate, women often do not have access to the full gamut of human emotions; because of sex role stereotypes that are still prevalent, women's emotions can be interpreted as meaning something other than what they are. New hires can bring in different ways of doing things, which can change the status quo. Be confident in bringing new ideas, but remember that senior faculty are often invested in old ones.

The third strategy is understand the history: know that these experiences are common. Work to create a supportive environment with other intersectional feminist professors. To change a hostile culture, ". . . we need to reconceptualize that work in a feminist way: change requires not only collaboration but also collaboration in support of a strategic purpose: a coalition" (Heinert & Phillips, 2017, p. 129). A coalition works toward reaching common goals and shares in the responsibility and credit for the work. Shaw (2012) describes ". . . the value of a feminist community as 'not feeling alone' and experiencing 'alignment' and affirmation of thinking that was difficult to find in any other forum" (p. 428).

The fourth strategy is documentation. Even if something seems small, keep a journal recording questionable events with details, times, dates, key players, etc. When and if something concrete happens, one will be more prepared to keep records, and the precursors of potential events will already be recorded.

For senior faculty: According to Sandberg (2013), "Once a woman achieves success, particularly in a gender-biased context, her capacity to see discrimination is reduced" (p. 163). Just because it did not happen to one does not mean that it is not happening to another. Due process is key when investigating discrimination and instances of bullying and harassment. Senior faculty should provide resources to support junior faculty, such as the following advocacy organizations:
American Association of University Women: https://www.aauw.org/
Feminists against Academic Discrimination: http://www.f-a-a-d.org/
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: https://www.eeoc.gov/

Finally, for all intersectional feminist academics, it is crucial that we tell our stories, whether they are in the past, or in our present. Speaking our truths will be the first step in working to change harmful institutional practices, or systemic inadequacies that allow harassment to exist unchallenged.

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