

Cole, Kirsti, and Holly Hassel, editors.
***Surviving Sexism in Academia: Strategies for Feminist Leadership.* Routledge, 2017. 315 pages.**

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I write this review between glances at the news, where it has become daily occurrence for one more man in power to be accused of sexual misconduct, and notifications from WPA-L, the listserv for writing program administrators, where the thread “We have a Weinstein problem” and its progeny dominated the late 2017 posts.

So I’m delighted to be able to offer Kirsti Cole and Holly Hassel’s excellent collection, *Surviving Sexism in Academia: Strategies for Feminist Leadership*, as a guidebook for these times and for the future. The thirty-two chapters (not including Cole and Hassel’s introduction, “I’m Afraid This Will Hurt Me: Addressing Sexism in Higher Education”) answer the calls for the naming of names and programs, yes, but more important, they provide practical, albeit hard-earned, strategies for fighting back against sexism, sexual assault, gendered discrimination, and “masculine ways of doing” in higher ed (*xvii*). Cole and Hassel offer the book as a resource for people like them: “What do you say about something you also fear? What will coming out against sexism in your workplace mean for you? How will people react? There aren’t good answers to these questions, but we hope that this collection will lay the groundwork for strategic and plausible responses. Perhaps the simple acknowledgement of the pervasiveness of sexism across disciplines, from contingent labor to the highest levels of administration, will help” (*xix*).

Organized into two sections—“Mapping the Challenges” and “Feminist Strategies for Action”—the book covers as much terrain as possible, describing and addressing experiences of faculty and staff, graduate students and contingent faculty, junior faculty and those close to retirement. Intended to be interdisciplinary, stories emerge from STEM and humanities fields alike and are told from the perspective of everyone from administrators to contingent faculty. This is intentional, according to Cole and Hassel, who write that they “assembled an interdisciplinary collection which we imagine as part storytelling, part autoethnography, part action plan. A necessary element for us in the initial stages of our discussion about this collection was that it be as diverse

as possible—diverse in perspectives, in methods, in voices; in types of institutions; in contributor backgrounds. We chose to include chapters that tackle sexism in the academy from not only a range of intellectual, disciplinary, and methodological approaches but also a diversity of tone, style, genre, and conventions” (xx). There are a few more tales from writing studies and English, likely because this is the location of the editors, but most of the narratives and strategies can be extrapolated to other departments, other disciplines. No one is left out, and everyone can find herself in this book.

The first section, “Mapping the Challenges,” presents story after story of sexist behavior at the authors’ institutions, from graduate programs to departments, and about everything from having and caring for children and family members (or being told not to) to protecting graduate students from predatory colleagues. This section is broken into three sub-sections: Dis/Locations, Disciplinary Contexts, and Embodied Gender. The second section, “Feminist Strategies for Action,” offers stories of collaboration and coalition, and is easily my favorite. It was hard to read the stories of sexist behavior without wanting specific steps for taking action. This second part of the book, with subsections titled Changing Material Conditions and Changing Ideologies, has those steps, and the stories that go along with them offer hope that things can, in fact, change.

The collection is a useful mentor text. I marked chapters—too many, really—to share with the faculty-staff Women’s Forum that I co-chaired at my institution. I have shared it with undergraduate women and the chair of my department. I talk about it frequently.

While all of the chapters are instructive, a few stand out. In “Remodeling Shared Governance: Feminist Decision Making and Resistance to Academic Neoliberalism,” Cole, Hassel, and Eileen E. Schell write, as somewhat of a super-group of feminist activists, of their experiences as leaders in shared governance at their respective institutions, including not only the wins, but the many hurtful losses they sustained along the way. If this is the roadmap, it indicates all the bumps and mileage to take into consideration. In “The Problem with the Phrase ‘Women and Minorities’: Racism and Sexism Intersectionality for Black Women Faculty,” E-K. Daufin presents an important reminder that Black women experience the academy in ways distinct from not only White women, but other women of color and Black men; there is, Daufin argues, significance in the categories we use to capture or indicate intersectionality. I marked every last page in Jennifer Heinert and Cassandra Phillips’ “From Feminized to Feminist Labor: Strategies for Creating Feminist Working Conditions in Composition,” which not only points out that academic labor is a feminist issue, but that feminist practice must move from collaboration to coalition-building to effect impactful and sustainable change.

The chapters represent a range of genre. While most adhere closely to the conventions of academic research writing, a few offer new ways to read and hear the stories. For instance, Katie Manthey uses the methodology of narrative story to interrogate the idea of “professional dress” in her chapter, “Dress for Success: Dismantling Politics of Dress in Academia,” while Heather Rosenfield uses a graphic/visual essay to tell the story of the Geography Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in “Beyond the Old Boys Club? Gender Relations at UW-Madison Geography from the 1970s to the Present.” Susan Diab, also writing about academic dress as metaphor for gendered academic performance and a piece of artwork, mixes autoethnography, epistolary, reflection, and short story into “Writing Gown: The Challenges of Making a New Artwork about Sexism in Academia.” Chapter 32, the final chapter, is an infographic created by Cole and Hassel that, as its title, “Surviving Sexism in Academia: Definitions and Strategies,” indicates, “synthesize[s] the collection into ‘takeaways’ that are distilled for easy discussion and consideration by readers” (Cole and Hassel, “I’m Afraid This Will Hurt Me,” *xxiii*). All of these unconventional pieces are delightful in their disruption of expectations for how we are allowed to talk about sexism in academia, and I’m glad Cole and Hassel chose to include them.

The perpetrators of the actions are not all men: women play a big, if not majority, role in sexist behavior. I was glad to see this included, in chapters such as consultant Fran Sepler’s “The Bullying We Don’t Talk About: Women Bullying Women in the Academy,” since it matches my own experiences and can be, right now, lost in the conversation about sexism and its equal-opportunity counterpart, bullying.

And, in fact, two of the pieces are made more effective by being co-authored by men. In “Surviving Sexism in Academia: Identifying, Understanding, and Responding to Sexism in Academia,” Heather Maldonado and John Draeger provide a useful primer on sexism, including definitions, history, case studies, and strategies for undoing it in different spaces in academia. In “Understanding Leadership with Women Community College Executives,” Hawa Ghaus-Kelley and Nathan R. Durdella describe the results of a study that looks at leadership styles of female community college executives and their recommendations for getting more women into those top positions.

As expected, I was most interested in stories that match my own experience. I have experienced little sexist behavior and no sexual harassment that I am aware of. As the national conversations have been playing out, I worried over not having a *#metoo* moment: would some see my silence as lack of interest? But I also rebelled some at the compulsion to have a moment to be able to “be” part of the movement; that to be a woman during the *#metoo* era meant you had to be a victim. Fortunately, the stories in this book don’t

force the issue: they don't require direct experience to be heard or believed. Moreover, they give those of us who have been fortunate to not be victims ideas for being allies and advocates and for paying attention to signs that bad things may be on the horizon. That's why these stories are valuable. It's not okay to think nothing is wrong just because you don't see it yourself. This is where the local or individual experience becomes generalizable. If it can happen there, it can—and probably is—happening here, too.

The only drawback is that the book needed one last proofread. There are some words missing and mis-transcribed. I imagine the authors of the chapters put the last set of eyes on them, and they were too familiar with the work to catch these tiny mistakes. For the reader, they can be a little distracting. Nonetheless, the book is important and will remain so for a long time to come. As I make final revisions to this review, Harvey Weinstein is going to trial, and a CFP inviting stories of sexual harassment in the academy is circulating. Sexism in the academy is nothing new, but our moment for addressing it is. Make sure you and/or your library has a copy. And share it with everyone you know.

About the Author

Paula Patch is a Senior Lecturer in English and College Writing Coordinator at Elon University, where she teaches writing, grammar, and literature courses in the English major and Elon Core Curriculum. She is the President-elect of the Carolinas Writing Program Administrators and chairs the Tenure-Free Faculty Caucus of the Council of Writing Program Administrators. She formerly co-chaired the Women's Forum at Elon, a 250-member employee resource group for female-identified faculty and staff of the university. Her work has appeared in TETYC and Composition Forum.