

Book Review: Feminism, Gender, and Universities: Politics, Passion and Pedagogies by Miriam E. David

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Feminism, Gender, and Universities celebrates the way in which feminism has forever changed the terrain of higher education whilst examining the impact that the movement has had on the lives of women engaged in teaching others, writes Katherine Williams.

Feminism, Gender, and Universities: Politics, Passion and Pedagogies. Miriam E. David. Ashgate. 2014.

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With *Feminism, Gender, and Universities*, [Miriam E. David](#), of the Institute of Education at the University of London, aims to demonstrate the positive impact that feminism has had on higher education. This is deftly illustrated through the testimonies of women who engaged with feminist theory throughout their own university experiences. The book is the result of the political project of feminism, and how feminism became a worldwide social movement in the twentieth-century – now culturally embedded in academia, and society at large.

The book comprises eight principle chapters which span the emergence of academic feminism chronologically. Women are grouped according to their decade of birth in ‘cohorts’. The study itself, according to the author, tries to be as inclusive as possible in terms of the global range of women invited to participate in the surveys that make up the vast wealth of the primary material used to collect the written testimonies of female academics.

However, the study includes women mainly from the ‘global north’, i.e., the USA, UK, Canada, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Israel, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa. Despite the lack of insight from women from the developing countries, David hopes that the study will have implications for and impact upon the ‘global south’ (xii), contributing to the fight against gender-based violence in all its requisite forms. David does not include any oral or written testimony by feminist men in academia in the text, but then, the project does not claim to speak for the feminist movement as a whole; it is but a contribution to the ever-changing landscape that is feminism, and feminist academia. David’s involvement in grassroots projects designed to celebrate International Women’s Day, amongst many others, illustrates that her desire to capture women’s voices is not limited to the relative privilege of the ivory tower.

The basis of the collective biography, as described in ‘Second Wave Feminism Break on the Shore of Academe’ (p. 95-123), is that participants in the project replied to questions designed to help them pinpoint when they became feminists. In the case of the aforementioned chapter, this would also include details of how the emergence of second wave feminism influenced their learning, and life (p.95). The responses in this case are, of course, diverse. Some women ‘became feminists’ after leaving university; some felt early ripples of feminism before, and during, their university experiences; some women, simply put, did not want to end up stifled and unfulfilled, like their mothers: ‘I was born a feminist! I did NOT want to ‘end up like my mother’-frustrated by being bright and unable to complete her schooling...’ (p. 110).



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Wider political projects became extremely influential to the women featured in the chapter; rising feminist 'stars' such as Germaine Greer, Kate Millet, and Sheila Rowbotham, and the emerging Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), became pivotal to individuals' feminist awakenings. Participants' personal and educational journeys were also marked by their readings of feminist, or women's literature: 'I became a feminist when I was about twelve when I read novels by a Punjabi writer called Nanak Singh. I was also influenced by Amrita Pritam, a Punjabi poet and novelist, and Waris Shah...they all critiqued women's positions in Punjabi society,' (p. 97). Ultimately, the women of this particular group didn't come to feminism solely through their engagement with popular feminist texts, or their involvement with the WLM; it was the political mood of the time and each woman's own personal circumstances that led them to 'create feminist knowledge with a passion,' (p. 111).

It becomes obvious throughout the text that feminist values transcend generations. David discovered that despite the differences in ages, location, educational experiences, or socio-economic backgrounds, the women involved in the project all shared a strong commitment to social and gender justice (p. 173). In 'Academic Feminism Today: Towards a Feminized Future in Global Academe' (p. 173-193), David discusses how the feminist mobilisation instigated in academia over the last fifty years can continue into the future. Whilst women have made many gains in academia, David contends that it is still a largely male-dominated environment; despite claims of gender equality within the academy, David claims that 'gender equality in terms of numbers is indeed misogyny masquerading as metric,' (p. 174). Feminism in the academy, according to the author, has been 'seduced' by neo-liberal corporate models that are increasing competition between universities, making for tense environments for the teaching of feminist, or women's studies. 'Marilyn' states 'the neo-liberal and increasingly illiberal university is fundamentally anti-pathetical to feminism, and I think women's studies as an academic discipline is in an increasingly uncomfortable tension between the ideals of feminism...and the demands of a neo-liberal institution,' (p. 175). Whilst women scholars are arguably better represented in academia today than the past, women's responsibility for the care of their children still makes a detrimental impact on career chances and promotion opportunities; academia seems geared towards androcentrism.

The cure for this 'feminist melancholia' (p. 179) is for the next generation of feminist academics to utilise the tools at their disposal to promote the feminist cause, namely, through social media outlets such as Twitter or Facebook, and good old fashioned awareness-raising. Education trailblazers such as Malala Yousafzai, says David, perfectly illustrate the importance of narrative-building in education settings; the obvious goal being not only upward social mobility for women, but also addressing gender-based violence.

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others. The text is not only a celebration of women academics and their feminist 'coming-of-age', but offers the reader a critical dissection of what the author considers the corporatisation of the university landscape. The oral and written testimonies collected by Miriam E. David nod to the feminist tradition of listening to women's voices, and giving their experiences a forum in which they can be heard.

Katherine Williams graduated from Swansea University in 2011 with a BA in German and Politics, and is currently studying for a MA in International Security and Development. Her academic interests include the de/construction of gender in IR, conflict-driven sexual violence, and memory and reconciliation politics. You can follow her on Twitter [@polygluttony](#). [Read more reviews by Katherine](#).

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