

## **CFP for edited volume: Narratives of Gendered Abuse in Academia**

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### **Edited volume: *Narratives of Gendered Abuse in Academia***

#### **CALL FOR ABSTRACTS**

Editors: Professor Mary K. Holland, SUNY New Paltz, and Professor Carrie Rohman, Lafayette College

#### **Deadline to submit abstract: April 1, 2022**

The popularity of the Netflix Series *The Chair* seems to be tied to its hyperbolic depictions of faintly legitimate power struggles that circulate on contemporary college campuses. But in focusing on the slapstick character Bill Dobson (male, white, hopelessly romantic), the narrative offers a political feint that distracts from actual abuses of power in academic life, abuses that are often misogynistic. While the #MeToo movement as a cultural, feminist, and antiracist force has been slowly and steadily uncovering and altering landscapes of gendered harassment and abuse across our society, academia itself as an abusive culture has remained fairly immune to these critiques. Scholars such as Sarah Ahmed have forcefully critiqued academic culture, helping us begin to theorize its endemic harassment and abuse. It is perhaps all too telling that Ahmed herself resigned from academia years ago, in protest over university failures around sexual harassment and assault. And so, one of our greatest critics of academia is no longer part of the academic system proper.

In her 1938 *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf repeatedly asks us to consider

what it will mean for women to follow their educated brothers into the professions: “It is true that for the past twenty years we have been admitted to the Civil Service and to the Bar; but our position there is still very precarious and our authority of the slightest” (12). Nearly one hundred years later, this sentiment still resonates. Woolf was more than prescient in warning women about what they would face as they joined the ranks of patriarchal institutions. Our contemporary failures to confront the institutional violences that continue to be reproduced within our profession—that we could argue continue to be central to our profession—exacerbate her prophecies all the more.

The 2015 book *Women Who Make a Fuss: The Unfaithful Daughters of Virginia Woolf*, written by Isabelle Stengers and Vinciane Despret and a collective of academic women, takes up Woolf’s injunction, “think we must,” in order to ask if women in academia have changed the form of thought in their respective fields. While the primary authors make it clear that experiences of gendered “discrimination” are not precisely the centerpiece of their project, the disillusioning realities of being a female academic inevitably seep into their powerful volume. Stengers and Despret highlight the entrapments of academic life, explaining, “we are among those women who have been where Woolf said we must not go, or in any case, not stay, for staying there, seeking to make a career in the university, is to be captured by it (for both young men and women)” (52). As their incorporation of multiple female voices reveals, “once you are inside, they will look for ways to devitalize you” (Sironi qtd. in Stengers and Despret 103).

This edited collection will document narratives of gendered abuse and disadvantage in academia, in order to bear witness to the ways that women, and all whose gender expression falls outside heteronormative masculinity, are devitalized in higher education. We are interested in the power of memoir becoming “anonymous,” in the circulating of anecdote as feminist documentation, and in the idea that the personal is political, theoretical, and professional. The collection will also ask after the ways that academic institutions replicate the kinds of gendered abuses that individuals experience in other forms of relationship, such as partner abuse, abuse in marriage, and abuse in family structures, alongside the failures of various therapeutic models in these analogous scenarios.

The co-editors aim to reimagine the academic editorial process along feminist lines for this project, which will likely involve more communal forms of writing and

re-writing than what is standard practice. For instance, we may orchestrate occasional virtual meetings among contributors, as we hope the project will function in the spirit of scholarly, activist, and advocacy frameworks.

Thus, **we seek first-person accounts of all varieties of gendered abuse, harassment, and/or discrimination as experienced by women and LGBTQ individuals in academia.** We welcome narratives

- from all academic disciplines;
- from any size or type of academic institution;
- from academics at all career stages, from graduate students to senior scholars;
- about all kinds of gendered abuse, including but not limited to sexual;
- about events that occurred across multiple years of individuals' careers, or singular potent events;
- that focus entirely on personal narrative, and/or that incorporate relevant studies or theory;
- from writers who want to attach their names to their pieces and those who wish to remain anonymous.

**Please submit your 500-750 word abstract, *brief* c.v., and contact information to both volume editors ([hollandmkh@newpaltz.edu](mailto:hollandmkh@newpaltz.edu) and [rohmanc@lafayette.edu](mailto:rohmanc@lafayette.edu)) by April 1, 2022.** And spread the word to friends and colleagues who might have their own stories to tell.

Mary K. Holland specializes in contemporary literature, theory, and women's writing at SUNY New Paltz. Her most recent book is *#MeToo and Literary Studies: Reading, Writing, and Teaching about Sexual Violence and Rape Culture* (co-edited with Heather Hewett; Bloomsbury 2021). She is also the author of two monographs on contemporary lit (Bloomsbury, 2013 and 2020) and co-editor of an MLA volume in the *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* series (2019).

Carrie Rohman works in animal studies, critical theory, modernism, and performance studies at Lafayette College. Her plenary address at the 2021 Annual

International Conference on Virginia Woolf examined gendered abuse in academia. Rohman contributed to the “#MeToo and Modernism” cluster in *Modernism/modernity* (2020) and is Associate Editor at *Contemporary Women’s Writing*. Her most recent book is *Choreographies of the Living: Bioaesthetics in Literature, Art, and Performance* (Oxford 2018).

Contact Info:

Mary K Holland, SUNY New Paltz

Carrie Rohman, Lafayette College

Contact Email:

[hollandm@newpaltz.edu](mailto:hollandm@newpaltz.edu)