


Book Reviews

Psychology of Women Quarterly
2020, Vol. 44(1) 135-141
© The Author(s) 2019
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
journals.sagepub.com/home/pwq



Joseph, R. L. (2018). *Postracial resistance: Black women, media, and the uses of strategic ambiguity*. New York: New York University Press. 253 pp. \$30 (paperback). ISBN 9781479886371.

Reviewed by: Claudia Barned , *Institut de recherches cliniques de Montreal, Montreal, Québec*
DOI: 10.1177/0361684319861968

Ralina Joseph's second book, *Postracial Resistance: Black Women, Media, and the Uses of Strategic Ambiguity* (2018) is a much-needed and much-welcomed contribution to the fields of critical feminist theory, media studies, and women of color theory. For those already familiar with scholarship on intersectionality, critical race theory, and Black feminist thought, Joseph's work complements this literature as her analysis provides a complex dissection of the social, political, economic, and gendered contexts in which Black female bodies are [mis]represented, [mis]understood, and negatively appraised in the United States.

Joseph's book does an excellent job of calling attention to the intersectional identities that are often missing from popular representations of Black women in the media. Her work encourages readers to reflect on and question the dominant narratives that are perpetuated in contemporary Western society. One of the many strengths of this book is that it puts into words everyday experiences that Black women face. Joseph mobilizes the notion of strategic ambiguity to showcase how women of color are often held to different standards and judged more harshly and with more scrutiny than their peers. *Postracial Resistance: Black Women, Media, and the Uses of Strategic Ambiguity* dramatizes the landscape for readers and paints a very vivid picture of how Black women must often negotiate particular messages or understandings of who they are and what they stand for.

The introduction thoroughly dissects the theoretical underpinnings of key concepts such as postrace and postracial resistance. Audiences outside of academia might find this particular section challenging as she critically untangles the

philosophical origins of these terms and their use. Her book contains six chapters, each capturing the experience of a specific group. The first half of the book (Chapters 1–3) relays the experiences of powerful Black women, namely Michelle Obama (Chapter 1), Oprah Winfrey (Chapter 2), and Shonda Rhimes (Chapter 3). The second half draws on ethnographic work and details the lived experiences of young Black college women (Chapters 4 and 5) and television executives (Chapter 6).

Written for and about Black women, this book tells the stories of different groups of women who have used or refused to use strategic ambiguity and postracial resistance as tools to navigate their social world. After reading this book, readers are able to understand the use of strategic ambiguity and how it can function as a (successful or unsuccessful) tool in different contexts. This book is a wonderful starting point for any reader interested in a critical analysis of the ways in which Black women are represented in United States media. It is likely to appeal to women of color wanting to learn more about the intersections of gender, race, and class and the ways in which Black women perform acts of resistance or engage in respectability politics. Joseph's book could serve as an essential reading or supplementary text for courses in Women and Gender Studies or Critical Psychology (courses such as Black Women's Studies, Black Representations, African-American Culture Studies, or Cultural Anthropology).

ORCID iD

Claudia Barned  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8622-2808>

Author Biography

Claudia Barned is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Pragmatic Health Ethics Research Unit of the Institut de recherches cliniques de Montreal and is affiliated with the department of Neurology and Neurosurgery at McGill University.

Caballero, C., Martínez-Vu, Y., Pérez-Torres, J., Téllez, M., & Vega, C. (Eds.). (2019). *The Chicana motherwork anthology*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press. 288 pp. \$24.95 (paperback). ISBN 9780816537990.

Reviewed by: Carmen Serrano , *University at Albany State University of New York, Albany, NY*
DOI: 10.1177/0361684319861359

The remarkable collection of research and testimonial essays in *The Chicana Motherwork Anthology* reflects upon the experiences of Chicana and other Women of Color Mother Scholars within academia and beyond. Most of the storytellers, researchers, and activists are first-generation scholars from working-class and (im)migrant families, who understand how institutional violence and exploitation have

negatively influenced their ability to excel in a university setting. Through their essays, these scholars denounce injustices, while also establishing coalitions that call for change within and outside academic institutions.

The book is divided into four parts (18 essays in total): (1) Separation, Migration, State Violence, and Detention, (2) Chicana/Latina/Women of Color Mother-Activists, (3) Intergenerational Mothering, and (4) Loss, Reproductive Justice, and Holistic Pregnancy. It includes writers who are Black, Chicana, Xicana-indígena, Chicana/Latina, and Afro-Chicana, thus emphasizing their heterogeneous identities. Although these essays speak to a diversity of experiences, they are united in that they narrate shared gendered, classed, and racialized challenges as first-generation Women of Color Mother Scholars and activists.

The introduction provides data to show how Women of Color (WOC) are underrepresented in academia. For example, in U.S. colleges and universities, 10.4% of instructors and lecturers are WOC. WOC represent 9.9% of assistant professors and 6.6% of associate professors. Only 3.4% of full professors are WOC (Harris & González, 2012, p. 2). The situation for Women of Color Mother Scholars is no better: They might face poverty level wages (in adjunct positions), accept unpaid service obligations, receive minimal childcare support, and endure unfair family leave policies. The contributors—doctoral students, professors, and activists—underscore the arduous realities of Mothers of Color (MOC) in academia. They illustrate how MOC are less likely to receive tenure-track positions and tenure, compared to their non-MOC colleagues. Their mentoring of Students of Color and their contributions to diversity initiatives often go unnoticed. MOC hardly receive the necessary resources to support their invisible labor and are often underappreciated. They are, many times, institutionally forced out. Despite the challenges that WOC Mother Scholars endure, the essays also aim to empower women, showing how coalitions can amplify female voices beyond academia to bring about enduring positive change.


The word *resilience* unites these multifaceted stories of resistance and transformation. The women have experienced both chronic and acute adversities: poverty, political violence, and rape, for example. Yet, their strong sense of motherhood and mothering (and, at times, self-mothering) become a locus of strength and power. Their compelling stories reveal their humanness and vulnerabilities: They struggled with infertility, left gang life, and survived sexual assault. In the face of adversity, they have excelled and are part of academia as professors, scholars, and/or activists.

The contributors are resilient, drawing strength from many sources. Some celebrate their maternal lineage, highlighting how mothers pass on spiritual wisdom that encourages and strengthens (Alma Itzé Flores and Andrea Garavito Martínez). They evoke knowledge from their ancestors, including Indigenous traditions to derive their *ganans*, or will (Irene Lara and Gabriela Spears-Rico). Altogether, the collection acknowledges the complexities of motherhood. If in the past women hid their motherhood and children for fear of not being “academic enough,” here they banish silence and make their children visible in their work for social justice.

This book also aims to create empathy through storytelling, illustrating the forces at play that limit Chicana and other WOC Mother Scholars’ ability to excel in the academy and beyond. This is a powerful collection of research, essays, and testimonies advocating for a more inclusive society for Chicana/Latina and other WOC Mother Scholars and activists. The contributors are strong, bold writers who disrupt the academic paradigm through their political advocacy and active publications. They are all, in the words of Grace Gómez, a contributor, “Fierce Mamas Rising.”

Feminist psychologists, who themselves are Women of Color Mother Scholars, will better understand how institutional circumstances affect their advancement, inspiring them to become part of a growing coalition. The volume’s intersectional cultural lens might also guide the practice of feminist psychologists and readers of *PWQ* who work with Women of Color Mother Scholars. This book would be an appropriate companion text for undergraduate and graduate courses in sociology, education, gender studies, ethnic studies, and U.S. Latino studies.

ORCID iD

Carmen Serrano  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7905-4762>

Reference

- Harris, A. P., & González, C. G. (2012). Introduction. In M. G. Gutiérrez, Y. F. Niemann, C. G. González, & A. P. Harris (Eds.), *Presumed incompetent: The intersections of race and class for women in academia* (pp. 1–16). Logan: Utah State University Press.

Author Biography

Carmen A. Serrano is an Assistant Professor at University at Albany, SUNY. She is Chicana and scholar of twentieth and twenty-first Latin American and U.S. Latinx literature and culture.