



Out in the Center: Public Controversies and Private Struggles

Denny, Harry; Mundy, Robert; Naydan, Liliana M.; Sévère, Richard; Sicari, Anna (eds.)
Utah State University Press, 2019

Book Review

Tags: pedagogy | teaching writing | writing centers

Reviewed by: Zandra Jordan

Date Reviewed: December 10, 2019

Out in the Center: Public Controversies and Private Struggles provides a fresh perspective on the inter- and intra-personal dynamics of writing center work. Building upon Greenfield's and Rowan's *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change* (2011), Condon's *I Hope I Join the Band: Narrative, Affiliation, and Antiracist Rhetoric* (2012), and Denny's own *Facing the Center: Toward an Identity Politics of One-to-One Mentoring* (2010), this edited collection presents the personal narratives of underrepresented voices in writing centers and invites critical conversation about the complexities of identity negotiation among tutors, writers, and administrators.

While some writing centers claim to be neutral spaces where writing is engaged apart from the culture that produced it, this collection acknowledges the ways in which writing and collaborations around writing are always already both personal and political – shaped by a confluence of internal and external factors. Writers, tutors, and administrators bring their selves to the work, thereby making public their past, present, and emerging identities, which are inextricable from the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics of the communities in which centers reside.

The collection is organized into six parts – race, multilingualism, gender and sexuality, religion, class, and (dis)ability – some with more narratives than others. This imbalance likely speaks to the variety of submissions and also signals the need for even more narratives from underrepresented and marginalized perspectives. Additionally, while each part is purposefully arranged, the editors recognize that identities are intersecting and note in the review following each section that identity categorizations are fluid.

Part I narrativizes the interplay between the reading or erasure of black female and male bodies in one-to-one consultations and the writing classroom and how those occurrences interconnect with public discourse on issues like black natural hair, Black Lives Matter, and black masculinity. Part II explores the benefits and complexities of multilingualism in the center and ways that tutors can leverage linguistic dexterity. Part III focuses on the role of gender and sexuality in the identity formation of writing center administrators and tutors. Part IV takes up religion, an identity-marker that is sometimes unseen, and asks how inviting disclosure of religious identities might challenge hegemonic norms. Part V considers how class converges with other identities in writing centers, inviting interrogation of economic standing and belonging. Part VI explores how learning differences can shape writing practices and influence pedagogical approaches to tutoring.

The collection concludes with a final chapter and afterword that encourage readers to recognize the pedagogical and epistemic value of these lived stories in their own contexts and for future research. Engaging meaningfully and critically with these stories and the intricacies of intersecting identities that they underscore enriches our ability to create more inclusive practices in hiring, training, and tutoring – a worthy charge and a fitting ending for this valuable work.