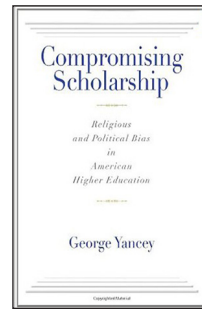


Book Review

George Yancey.

Compromising Scholarship: Religious and Political Bias in American Higher Education. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2011. ISBN 978-1602582682, 250+xiv pp. USD 33.57.



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One long-standing accusation leveled at the field of higher education is that it is elitist, left-leaning politically, and hostile towards religion and faith. In *Compromising Scholarship: Religious and Political Bias in American Higher Education* George Yancey, a professor of Sociology at the University of North Texas, makes the argument that academia is biased against religious people and religious scholarship.

Yancey asserts that more academics identify as politically progressive than conservative. Second, he claims that politically and religiously conservative people are an oppressed minority within higher education. The former point is supported by outside data, but the latter is what he is really trying to prove through his research. In order to do so he draws correlations between Christian Evangelicals and Fundamentalists and groups that have historically experienced oppression and disenfranchisement, such as women and racial minorities.

Yancey argues that liberal academics are fighting a culture war against conservatives, and that this has caused a bias, conscious or not, particularly against religiously conservative people. He asserts that this bias is influencing the type of scholarship that is being done, particularly in the physical sciences. “Scientific knowledge that promotes the interests of favored social groups, such as the ACLU and Democratic Party, may be encouraged as the

needs and interest of members of these groups gain special favor among scholars,” he writes. “On the other hand, academics may possess little interest in addressing the interests or concerns of disfavored groups.” (150)

Yancey utilizes both an anonymous survey of academics and the online blogs of sociologists to explore whether there is a liberal bias within higher education. As a professor of Sociology Yancey focuses his inquiry on that field, and tries to generalize his findings to other disciplines using the data he collects. His survey had a response rate of 29%, or 439 respondents. Yancey presents his survey under the umbrella of exploring collegiality, but with the intent to ascertain whether or not there is a bias in hiring practices. He astutely points out that it would be very difficult to get people to admit to any sort of bias when it comes to hiring, and thus he attempts to get around that by disguising his survey.

Although he does ask about hiring, because he has framed this as a survey about collegiality there is an emphasis on who his respondents would most like to work with, rather than whom they would hire when sitting on a hiring committee. This may seem like a small distinction, but is actually significant. While people may have strong preferences about who they would prefer to work with, those preferences do not necessarily lead to a bias against hiring people from groups that are not strongly preferred.

The biggest problem with Yancey's argument is that he does not allow for any sort of intersectional approach to understanding power and oppression. While it may be true that those who identify as religious or social conservatives are underrepresented in academia, that does not necessarily equate to oppression. Had Yancey utilized the theory of intersectionality, in which a person can be privileged in one context and oppressed in another, he would have been able to make a stronger case. However, trying to make a one to one correlation between the underrepresentation of conservatives in academia and the systematic exploitation and oppression of racial minorities, without looking at wider societal conditions, results in an argument that feels underdeveloped.

While there is an argument to be made that there is an underrepresentation of conservative voices in mainstream academia, Yancey does not take in to account other possible causes for the imbalance, such as self-selecting by conservatives out of academia. By addressing only one possible cause he limits the scope and effect of his argument. It is worthwhile to explore possible biases within mainstream academics. Unfortunately Yancey's argument falls short. Had he utilized an intersectional approach in his scholarship his argument would have been more nuanced and effective.