

Introduction

We have decided to do our final discussion project on Intersectional Feminism. It seems that the topic of Intersectional feminism has been a theme not only in topics covered in class but seems to have become more prevalent in day-to-day topics. The road to Intersectional Feminism started paving its way starting in the second module with a video clip of the interview between Toni Morrison and PBS's Charlie Rose. Rose and Morrison were discussing racism when Morrison said that "white people have a very, very serious problem and *they* should start thinking about what *they* can do about it." From there we selected to do our book review on the *Feminist Mystique*. Recognized as a major piece of feminist prose it, glaringly, represents a singular view of feminism. Meaning, though the novel put a name to the unnamed problem of women's oppression it did so from a white, middle-classed perspective. Feminism over the years has adopted a "one-size-fits-all position where middle class white women are the mold that others must fit" (Uwujaren and Utt, 2015). How can women work toward a common goal of freedom from oppression that includes a recognition of privilege from white women along with a multi-dimensional approach where voices can be heard from various races and cultural and socio-economic backgrounds? This is where intersectional feminism enters.

What is Intersectional Feminism?

At its core, intersectional feminism is based in intersectionality. The basic definition of intersectionality is "the theory that the overlap of various social identities, as race, gender, sexuality, and class, contributes to the specific type of systemic oppression and discrimination experienced by an individual" (<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/intersectionality?s=t>). Uwujaren and Utt (2015) define intersectionality as a "framework that must be applied to all social justice work, a frame that recognizes the multiple aspects of identity that enrich our lives and experiences and that compound and complicate oppressions and marginalizations. We cannot separate multiple oppressions, for they are experienced and enacted intersectionally." To add a feminist touch, Ava Vidal (2014) sums up intersectional feminism well when she says that "certain groups of women have multi-layered facets in life that they have to deal with. There is no one-size-fits-all type of feminism." Intersectional feminism is the crossroads where gender, class, race, and culture meet and join in an effort to move forward

Literature Review

Okolosie, L. (2014). Beyond 'talking' and 'owning' intersectionality. *Feminist Review*, 108, 90-96. doi: 10.1057/fr.2014.14

Okolosie recognizes that feminism has been presented from a predominately white, privileged perspective. She notes that social media has led to an increase in the spread of black feminist voices and had increased the visibility of intersectional feminism. With more dialogue and voice presence it is still important, Okolosie stresses, to make sure that feminists are not becoming intersectional in words alone. She does recognize that "intersectionality has become synonymous with black feminism rather than a product of black feminist scholarship" (Okolosie, pg. 92). It is important that feminists make sure that they are not too focused on race that they are blinded to other forms of oppression. For instance, "ability, sexuality, age, nationality, and class become areas that exist within our safe spaces as marginal" (Okolosie, pg. 93). Okolosie recognizes that there are far too little real world examples of the practice of intersectionality; however, she does emphasize the importance of self-reflection in promoting intersectionality.

Valdivia, A. (2010). Feminist scholarship in the new decade: Three challenges to steer us through turbulent times. *Women & Language*, 33(1), 109-112.

Valdivia's article is mostly related to feminist scholarship. The main idea behind her piece is that even though women have won, well-fought battles nothing is permanent. She provides three main ideas that will help women maintain their victories. Her three ideas are: 1) Stay vigilant, 2) Resist tokenizing difference and treating it as experience rather than knowledge, and 3) Encourage and contribute to intersectional feminist scholarship. Valdivia feels that it is important to keep the struggles of the marginalized groups in the forefront of discussion and to make sure these groups are represented within various agencies. Lastly, and arguably her most important idea is that of intersectional feminist scholarship. She believes it is important that scholars keep up with the literature produced by marginalized feminists. Valdivia encourages women scholars to work hard because they (scholars) have "a history of laboring to make the world a more just place for the benefit of all" (Valdivia, pg. 112).

Wanggren, L. & Sellberg, K. (2012) Intersectionality and dissensus: A negotiation of the feminist classroom. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 31(5/6), 542-555.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02610151211235514>

Wanggren and Sellberg discuss their belief that the classroom should be predominately based around feminist pedagogy. The main idea behind this is that "teaching becomes a way of questioning power dynamics and social structures that exist both within and outside the classroom. Teaching might offer a way for feminist academics to problematise a perceived gap between theory and practice" (543). The two authors continue by discussing intersectional feminism and why it is important which leads to teaching and feminism. Wanggren and Sellberg introduce Ranciere's theory of the ignorant schoolmaster. This allows the teacher to be ignorant of inequality and puts them in a position to learn alongside their students. Wanggren and Sellberg demonstrate the importance of the teaching position but from the feminist perspective that allows there to be flexibility within the power hierarchy and creates an environment where the students can develop critical thinking skills.

How has critical theory provided a way for you to understand current trends in adult education?

It is interesting to look through the lens of intersectional feminism in regards to adult education. According to bell hooks (2010), a "feminist educator must arouse our collective will to continue freedom's struggle to use our intellect and imagination to forge new liberatory ways of knowing, thinking, and being, to work for change" (pg. 170). In this feminist classroom, these new ways of knowing and thinking should be "understood and defined pedagogically, as questions of strategy and practice as well as scholarship, in order to transform educational institutions radically" (Wanggren and Sellberg, pg. 546). Why is it important to transform educational institutions? Educational institutions are still, predominantly, male dominated and in order to change the status quo one must begin by engaging in critical thinking in the classroom. Having worked in higher education for over ten years, I have noticed a slow shift that includes more women in various positions. Instead of only having women in clerical positions, they have positions as Vice Presidents, Provosts, Deans, and Board of Trustees. In addition to higher-ranking positions, there is a more diverse representation of women in these institutions. These shifts are because a space was created

where “constructive critique and new ways of approaching the unbalanced power structures of academia may be formed—and in doing so we attempt to prepare the way for continually modifying and modifiable social equalities” (Wanggren and Sellberg, pg. 553).

Learning Activity

Title of Activity: Not your mama’s feminism!

Who: Women 18 years and older

What: Discussion on Intersectional Feminism

Where: Public Library meeting room

When: Saturday, 9:00 am—Noon

How:

Using the following resources (handouts of the two articles above will be handed out to each participant when she arrives):

- Why Our Feminism Must Be Intersectional (And 3 Ways to Practice It) by Jarune Uwujaren and Jamie Utt
 - <http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/01/why-our-feminism-must-be-intersectional/>
- 'Intersectional feminism'. What the hell is it? (And why you should care) by Ava Vidal
 - <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10572435/Intersectional-feminism.-What-the-hell-is-it-And-why-you-should-care.html>

The discussion will be facilitated by a group of three women with a diverse (race) background.

To begin the discussion, the facilitators will introduce themselves and provide a brief bio. Each participant will also introduce themselves and provide a brief introduction.

After introductions, the facilitators will explain to the group that in today’s discussion the focus will be on Intersectional Feminism, what it means, how it applies to them, and how they can integrate more intersectionality into their approaches to feminism. The participants will be asked to take about thirty minutes and read the handouts that were given to them when they arrived.

Depending on the number of participants, the group will either stay together (if smaller numbers) or break out into three groups (one with each facilitator). The groups will then discuss their reactions to the articles, how they have noticed intersectionality in their lives or how they noticed it is missing, and come up with a few steps to move forward in their everyday lives to help feminism to be more inclusive of other women.

After the group discussion, the small groups will come back together as one large group. The facilitators will ask if anyone would like to share what they talked about in their smaller groups.

There will be a sign-up sheet listed if any of the participants would like to receive updates about other group events in the community.

Summary of connection to theory:

The idea behind this activity is to create an awareness of intersectional feminism. The two articles are written in order to bring a new perspective from the traditional, white feminism. These two pieces, along with the dialogue should help provide more context for intersectional feminism and provide additional insight on what women can do to practice intersectionally. According to hooks we must “require a feminist theory and practice that not only raises consciousness but offers new and different ways to think and be” (hooks, pg. 171).

Resources:

hooks, b. (2010). *Teaching Critical Thinking (Practical Wisdom)*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Okolosie, L. (2014). Beyond ‘talking’ and ‘owning’ intersectionality. *Feminist Review*, 108, 90-96. doi: 10.1057/fr.2014.14

Uwujaren, J. & Utt, J. (2015, Jan 11). Why our feminism must be intersectional (and 3 ways to practice it). Retrieved from <http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/01/why-our-feminism-must-be-intersectional/>

Vidal, A. (2014, Jan 15). 'Intersectional feminism'. What the hell is it? (And why you should care). Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10572435/Intersectional-feminism.-What-the-hell-is-it-And-why-you-should-care.html>

Valdivia, A. (2010). Feminist scholarship in the new decade: Three challenges to steer us through turbulent times. *Women & Language*, 33(1), 109-112.

Wanggren, L. & Sellberg, K. (2012) Intersectionality and dissensus: A negotiation of the feminist classroom. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 31(5/6), 542-555. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02610151211235514>