

The Multiple Identities of Feminism (Intersectionality)

For the seminar, as you read this paper and the recommended articles, think about the following questions:

1. Would you define “feminism” the same way that this paper does? If not, how would you define the term?
2. What is the role of feminism in today’s society- work, home, culture, other?
3. What is the role of feminism in today’s politics both in the U.S. and world-wide?
4. Why might some people/cultures feel threatened by feminism?
5. What challenges does intersectionality bring to feminism as a cultural movement?
6. What opportunities does intersectionality bring to feminism as a cultural movement?

The 2016 campaign season brought Women’s issues to the front and center once again. Campaign rhetoric and misogynistic statements made last year and then the shocking result of the election, resulted in feminists, old and young, rising up in protest.

Someone recently asked me, what is Feminism? And not being content with my own answer, I decided to do some research. The dictionary defines it as “the advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes,” with synonyms being “the women's movement, the feminist movement, women's liberation, female emancipation, women's rights; and *Informal-* women's lib.”

To start, I’d like to dispel a misunderstanding and offer this short article by Hannah McAtamney writing for the Huffington Post on what Feminism is *not*:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/womens-rights-news/what-is-feminism_b_6985612.html

Wikipedia offers a rather comprehensive overview of Feminism at this site: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminism>

I would encourage everyone to read this in its entirety at their leisure, but for the purposes of this seminar, I’ll focus on the first four paragraphs, reprinted as follows:

Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define and advance political, economic, personal, and social rights for women. This includes seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment.

Feminist movements have campaigned and continue to campaign for women's rights, including the right to vote, to hold public office, to work, to earn fair wages or equal pay, to own property, to receive education, to enter contracts, to have equal rights within marriage, and to have maternity leave. Feminists have also worked to promote bodily autonomy and integrity, and to protect women and girls from rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence.

Feminist campaigns are generally considered to be a main force behind major historical societal changes for women's rights, particularly in the West, where they are near-universally credited with achieving women's suffrage, gender neutrality in English, reproductive rights for women (including access to contraceptives and abortion), and the right to enter into contracts and own property. Although feminist advocacy is, and has been, mainly focused on women's rights, some feminists, including bell hooks, (American author, feminist, and social activist) argue for the inclusion of men's liberation within its aims because men are also harmed by traditional gender roles. Feminist theory, which emerged from feminist movements, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and lived experience; it has developed theories in a variety of disciplines in order to respond to issues concerning gender.

Numerous feminist movements and ideologies have developed over the years and represent different viewpoints and aims. Some forms of feminism have been criticized for taking into account only white, middle class, and educated perspectives. This criticism led to the creation of ethnically specific or multicultural forms of feminism, including black feminism and intersectional feminism.

This fourth paragraph from the Wikipedia article brings us to a challenge in all political interest movements, to which Feminism is no exception. Political movements are made up of people and work in the interests of people. People,

individually and in subsets of the general population, are complex beings and, thus, have complex needs. The term *intersectional feminism* highlights one such complexity.

What is intersectional feminism? Again I return to Wikipedia and recommend this article:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intersectionality>

These excerpts are what I wish the seminar to focus on in particular:

Intersectionality is the idea that multiple identities intersect to create a whole that is different from the component identities. These identities that can intersect include gender, race, social class, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, mental disability, physical disability, mental illness, and physical illness as well as other forms of identity.

Intersectionality proposes that all aspects of one's identity need to be examined as simultaneously interacting with each other and affecting one's privilege and perception in society, and that these facets of identity cannot simply be observed separately."

Early intersectional theories "challenged the notion that 'gender' was the primary factor determining a woman's fate." It came to be recognized that the experiences of women who are subjected to multiple forms of subordination within society needed to be addressed. Women of color have a vastly different experience from white women due to their race and/or class. From there current theories now include gender, race, sexuality and class.

As I noted in the focus questions at the beginning of this paper, intersectionality in the modern Feminist political movement presents both challenges and opportunities. I will be very interested to hear your ideas on what these might be. Here is an article written by a black woman that speaks to this issue rather eloquently:

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/01/19/feminism-intersectionality-racism-sexism-class/96633750/>

This article speaks briefly to the issue of intersectionalism and how is it particularly relevant in the wake of the Women's March movement: <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/02/21/515799019/today-s-feminism-too-much-marketing-not-enough-reality>

Like many like-minded people across the country, I watched in alarm while the election returns came in last November. Many battles I thought had been fought and won years ago seemed to have been swept away in the populist rhetoric of the winning presidential candidate. His own descriptions of his past behavior and intents would have seemed to be disqualifying after the victories of the women's movements of the past in this country. However, as we saw, our voting public either took these victories for granted, assuming them so well-ingrained in our culture that they didn't need defending or, more frighteningly, felt that Feminism was not in their interest.

The Women's March Movement strives to embrace the theories of intersectionality." One cannot speak about feminism without acknowledging the dismal lack of representation for, and at times an active sidelining and silencing of the issues facing women of color, women with disabilities, sex workers, low-income women, and the LGBTQIA+ community." -

<https://www.womensmarch.com/reflect-resist/>

When we examine issues of oppression in silos, people fall through the cracks and into the margins. The Women's March organizers commit to focusing on those cracks and margins. In doing so, they strive to unfurl an umbrella under which individually powerful movements - racial justice, gender justice, disability justice, labor justice, and more - can unite, with a collective emphasis on the people and communities that are so often left behind or treated as an afterthought.

Glossary

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/03/16/feminism-glossary-lexicon-language/99120600/>

SUGGESTED ARTICLES

[Why Lemonade Is For Black Women](#)

By Dominique Matti

[This Is What I Mean When I Say White Feminism](#)

By Cate Young

[They Pretend To Be Us While Pretending We Don't Exist](#)

By Jenny Zhang

[Self-Portraits](#)

By Devan Diaz

[Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory](#)

By Rosemarie Garland-Thomson

Opinion: After a Historic March, What's Next for Women?

By Tina Brown

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/31/us/tina-brown-whats-next-for-women.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=second-column-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&_r=1

SUGGESTED BOOKS

This Bridge Called My Back: [Writings by Radical Women of Color](#)

Edited by Cherríe L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa

[Feminism Is for Everybody](#)

by bell hooks

[The Miner's Canary](#)

by Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres

[Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More](#)

by Janet Mock

[Fading Scars: My Queer Disability History](#)

By Corbett Joan O'Toole

SUGGESTED FILMS

[She's Beautiful When She's Angry \(2014\)](#)

[Made in L.A. \(2007\)](#)

[MAJOR! \(2016\)](#)

[Don't Tell Anyone \(No Le Digas a Nadie\) \(2015\)](#)

[Free Angela and All Political Prisoners \(2015\)](#)