Interrogating INTERSECTIONALITY AND FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

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INTERROGATING INTERSECTIONALITY AND FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

- Intersectionality as analytic tool
  origin, meaning and relevance

- Intersectionality and its critics
  key debates, cautionary notes and other epistemic concerns

- Intersectionality as academic activism
  decolonising University classrooms, democratising the curriculum and disrupting neoliberal diversity
‘Who am I’ riddles/
POLITICS OF LOCATION IN THE ACADEMY

Invisible in curricula, hypervisible in academia
Who am I?
From the majority world, a minority in this part of the world
Who am I?
Neither insider nor outsider, forever on the margins
Who am I?
Difficult to identify with, yet identified by many descriptors
I am
Woman of colour, Asian Indian, political sociologist, postcolonial feminist
I am
Where many lines of difference meet
I am
Embodied intersectionality.

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WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves (Collins and Bilge 2016).
'INTERSECTIONALITY-LIKE THINKING'

Sojourner Truth, 1851: 'Ain't I a woman?'

Combahee River Collective, 1977: 'interlocking systems of oppression'

Gloria Anzaldua, 1987: 'borderlands of identities and experiences'

Gail Omvedt, 1979: 'downtrodden among the downtrodden'/ 'triple oppression'

Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, 1983: 'gender, ethnic and class divisions as mutually constitutive'
'the most important theoretical contribution of women's and gender studies to date' (McCall 2005)

'the most valid theoretical approach to study social stratification' (Yuval-Davis 2015)

'welcomed the margins to the table of theory making' (Lewis 2013)
INTERSECTIONALITY AND ITS CRITICS

- What is intersectionality – a metaphor, a heuristic device, a concept, or a theory? (Anthias 2009; Davis 2008; Lutz 2001; May 2014)

- Additive vs. Constitutive? (Collins 2000; Hancock 2013; Menon 2015; Rege 2000)

- Identity-Structure: 'either/or' or 'both/and'? How many levels of analysis? (Anthias 1998; Crenshaw 1989; Menon 2015; Yuval-Davis 2006)
INTERSECTIONALITY AND ITS CRITICS

- How many, and which lines of difference? Some more central? (Bilge 2013; Butler 1990; Lutz 2001; Menon 2015)

- Relevance outside the context of origin? Anything new to offer? (Cho, McCall and Crenshaw 2013; John 2015; Menon 2015; Nash 2008; Yuval-Davis 2015)
INTERROGATING INTERSECTIONALITY

INTERSECTIONALITY AND ITS CRITICS

- Widespread espousal: sign of success/danger of cooption, depoliticisation, erasure? (Bilge 2013; May 2014; Menon 2015)
‘Mirror mirror on the wall’/
PROMISE AND PERILS OF INTERSECTIONAL PEDAGOGY

What is Intersectional Pedagogy, Take I:
Calling out the God trick
Changing answers to old questions
Complicating identity
Confronting one another across differences
Cathartic, did you say?

What is Intersectional Pedagogy, Take II:
Admitting power and privilege, fear and rage
Accepting conflict as a catalyst for change
Acknowledging the wounds of struggle
And allowing solidarity a chance
Ah ha, it’s like playing ‘mirror mirror on the wall’!
What is Intersectional Pedagogy, Take III:
Dismantling the canon
Decentring the knowledge field
Displacing the universal self
Dislocating white, First World subjectivities
Dizzying, did you say?

What is Intersectional Pedagogy, Take IV:
Transgressing boundaries
Troubling reflections
Transforming the gaze
Teaching about margins at the intersections
Terrifying, did you say?

My understanding and efforts to incorporate intersectional pedagogy in my teaching practice derive from my engagement with the writing and ideas of Freire (1968), Crenshaw (1989), hooks (1994), Spivak (2008) and Mohanty (1984; 2003) among others, as is reflected in this poem.
The Privilege Walk is a social experiment designed to visually represent privilege and create awareness and understanding among participants and viewers.

Examples of identity cards
- ‘33 year old, married Indian female University lecturer on a highly skilled work visa’
- ‘53 year old white British male artist’

Examples of statements
- If you can show affection for your romantic partner in public without fear of ridicule or violence, take one step forward.
- If you have ever been the only person of your race/gender/sexual orientation in a classroom or workplace setting, please take one step back.
DECENTERING LEARNING

Given the politics of privilege and ethnocentrism, is Transnational Feminist Praxis Possible?

- Read excerpts from hooks’ *Feminism Is For Everybody* (2000) and Namala’s ‘Dalit Women’ (2008)

- Imagine Black feminist activist, bell hooks and Dalit (ex-untouchable) feminist scholar activist, Annie Namala were to meet. What would they say to each other?
  - about women of color/ Dalit women? Are there any similarities in their condition?
  - about women in Civil Rights/Dalit movements in the United States and in India?
  - about feminist women’s movements in both countries?
  - about the possibility of transnational feminist praxis?

- Write up this conversation with yourself as the moderator.
Only 85 of the UK’s 18,500 professors are of colour

Of the 85 professors of colour, only 17 are women of colour

A cursory glance at the heads of higher education institutions in the country reveals that just three out of 159 are of colour

(Grove 2014; University and College Union 2013 and 2016)
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- Intersectionality as analytic tool

- Key academic debates on intersectionality, with important implications for equality practitioners and policymakers

- Intersectionality as critical pedagogy for decolonising feminist classrooms in British HE

- Interrogating intersectionality less about what *is* intersectionality, more about what it can *do!*