



An Introduction: Feminist Perspectives



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Background Information

This presentation was grant-funded by the ACPA Commission for Professional Preparation. It focuses on the below two readings and is available for download in the hopes that people will utilize this information in graduate preparation programs and professional development programs.

Pasque, P. A. & Errington Nicholson, S. (Eds.) (2011). *Empowering women in higher education and student affairs: Theory, research, narratives and practice from feminist perspectives*. Sterling, VA: Stylus and the American College Personnel Association.

Pasque, P. A. (2011). Women of color in higher education: Theoretical perspectives. In G. Jean-Marie and B. Lloyd-Jones (Eds.) *Women of Color in Higher Education: Turbulent Past, Promising Future*, Vol. 9. (pp. 21-47). Bingley, UK: Emerald.

Agenda

- **Definitions of Feminism**
- **Biological Sex vs. Gender**
 - **Exercise**
- **Types of Oppression**
 - **Brainstorm Exercise**
- **Waves of Feminism**
 - **Questions for Discussion**
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What is feminism?

In *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, bell hooks (2000) shares her “simple definition” of feminism:

“Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (p. viii).

- **Feminism** is a complex notion that has vast differences in meaning and connotation for people spanning generations, ethnic identities, sexual orientations, social classes, nationality, and myriad identities.
- **Feminism** is not a static notion; rather it evolves with us throughout our lives and is shaped by the various lenses we use to view the world at large and, most importantly, ourselves.



Feminist theory is founded on three main principles (Ropers-Huilman, 2002).

1. Women have something valuable to contribute to every aspect of the world.
2. As an oppressed group, women have been unable to achieve their potential, receive rewards, or gain full participation in society.
3. Feminist research should do more than critique, but should work toward social transformation.

Biological Sex vs. Gender

- **Biological Sex** refers to the physiological and anatomical characteristics of maleness and/or femaleness with which a person is born.
- **Gender Identity** refers to one's psychological sense of oneself as a male, female, gender transgressive, etc.
- **Gender Role** refers to the socially constructed and culturally specific behavior and expectations for women (i.e. femininity) or men (i.e. masculinity) and are based on heteronormativity.
- **Gender Expression** refers to the behavior and/or physical appearance that a person utilizes in order to express their own gender. This may or may not be consistent with socially constructed gender roles.

(Adams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P., 1997;
Hackman, 2010)

Classroom Exercise



Sex & Gender Visual Representations (30 Minutes)

Instructions: Provide each person with markers and newsprint. Ask everyone to fold the paper into four quadrants. Instruct each person to draw the answers to each question within each quadrant. When finished, discuss the answers in small or large groups.

Quadrant 1: Draw the first time you remember noticing/becoming aware of biological sex.

Quadrant 2: Draw the first time you remember noticing/becoming aware of gender identity, gender roles, and/or gender expression.

Quadrant 3: Draw a picture of your own sex and/or gender as you personify it within the field of student affairs and higher education.

Quadrant 4: Draw a picture of sex and/or gender as you feel students personify it within your functional area of student affairs or higher education (this could be the majority of students in your area or not – it is your choice).

Classroom Exercise

Sex & Gender Drawings (30 Minutes)

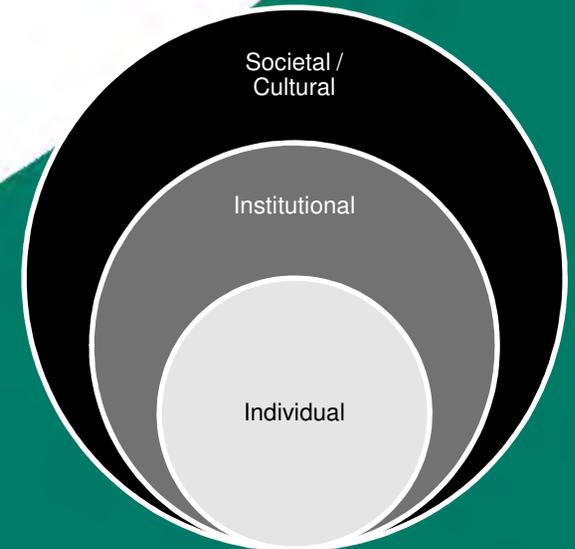
Discussion Questions:

- Describe the pictures you have drawn within each quadrant.
- How is biological sex, gender identity, gender roles, and/or gender expression easy and/or difficult for you in student affairs and higher education?
- How is biological sex, gender identity, gender roles, and/or gender expression easy and/or difficult for undergraduates at your institution?
- In what ways are the pictures that people in the room drew similar to or different from each other?
- In what ways are constructions of gender useful and/or problematic in student affairs and higher education?
- What might you do in order to help your colleagues and undergraduates explore more about their own conceptualizations of sex and gender?

Types of Oppression

- **Individual:** Attitudes and actions that reflect prejudice against a social group.
- **Institutional:** Policies, laws, rules, norms, and customs enacted by organizations and social institutions that disadvantage some social groups and advantage other social groups. These institutions include religion, government, education, law, the media, and health care system.
- **Societal/Cultural:** Social norms, roles, rituals, language, music, and art that reflect and reinforce the belief that one social group is superior to another.

(Hardiman, Jackson & Griffin, 2010)





The Three Waves of Feminism

- The history of feminism is often described in three temporal waves.
- This concept originated with the Irish activist Frances Power Cobbe in 1884 who shared that movements “resemble the tides of the ocean, where each wave obeys one more uniform impetus, and carries the waters onward and upward along the shore” (as cited in Hewitt, 2010, p. 2).
- When viewing feminism through the metaphor of a wave, it is important to understand that this idea of uniform and monolithic waves is often reductive and ignores multiple and often simultaneous movements within and across race, ethnicity, nationality, class, etc. As such, it disregards bravery of women around the globe prior to the nineteenth century.



The First Wave

- The *First Wave* occurred during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- It involved some of the foremothers of liberal feminism such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage who, in advocating for divorce laws to protect the rights of women, cited Iroquois laws that ensured a man provided for his family on pain of banishment.
- There was a strong influence of Native American women with whom white women shared land. The pioneers of the women's movement took cues from Native American ancestors such as the Iroquois system of election, whereby women chose their governmental representative from among eligible men.



The Second Wave

- The Second Wave occurred during the 1960's and 1990's.
- It unfolded in the context of the antiwar and civil rights movements and the growing self-consciousness of a variety of marginalized groups around the world.
- The Second Wave differed from the First Wave in that it “drew in women of color and developing nations, seeking sisterhood and solidarity and claiming ‘women’s struggle as class struggle’” (Rampton, 2008, para 8).
- Some notable events during this period include the passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the formation of the National Organization for Women, passage of Title IX in the Education Amendments of 1972, the *Roe v. Wade* decision, and the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan.



The Third Wave

- The Third Wave is considered as the timeframe from 1990's to present day.
- It is informed by postcolonial and postmodern thinking.
- Third Wavers often mystifies earlier feminists as many have reclaimed lipstick, high heels, and cleavage. In addition, tattoos may adorn current day feminists.
- This wave breaks constraining boundaries of gender, including what it deems essentialist boundaries set by the earlier waves.
- Controversy and disagreement around identity politics between feminists in the third wave have escalated.



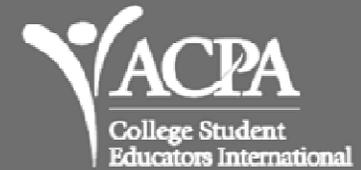
Questions for Discussion

- What questions do you have for women from each wave? Why might it be useful to ask these questions? Is there a way to research the answer to your questions?
- Why do you think some people argue that “waves” of feminism are reductive?
- Talk about the controversies between feminists today. More specifically, why do some women who have tattoos, show cleavage, and enjoy high heels consider themselves feminists whereas some argue that this form of gender expression is not reflective of feminist ideals? In your opinion, is there a right answer – why or why not?

Conceptualizations of Feminism

- There are many different conceptualizations, or variations, of feminism.
- Though not all inclusive by far, this presentation provides a basic introduction to some of these different perceptions of feminism.
- Some of these perspectives are congruent with each other, some build off of each other, and some are in strict opposition to each other. We encourage you to read about these and additional feminist perspectives beyond this presentation.

Liberal Feminism

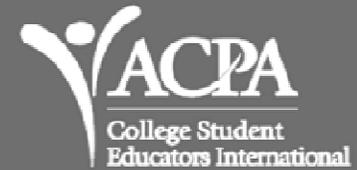


- Liberal feminism is a traditional perspective that was established as a part of the first wave of feminism. It is often the root of comparison when deconstructing contemporary conceptualizations of feminism.
- It argues that “society has a false belief that women are by nature less intellectually and physically capable than men” (Tong, 2009, p. 2).
- This perspective seeks to level the playing field that would allow women to seek the same opportunities as men, especially the opportunity to excel in various fields.
- Modern liberal feminists argue that patriarchal society fuses sex and gender together, making only those jobs that are associated with the traditionally feminine appropriate for women to pursue.



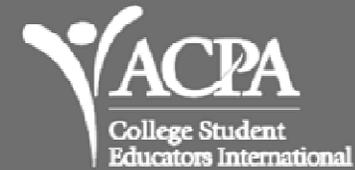
- Radical feminism is the second most notable form of feminism.
- Radical feminists think liberal feminist perspectives are not drastic enough to address the centuries of individual, institutional, and systemic oppression that have ensued.
- This can be further deconstructed into two types:
 - Libertarian radical feminism focuses on personal freedom of expression but also turns to androgyny as an option.
 - Cultural radical feminism expressly argues that the root cause of the problem is not femininity, but the low value that patriarchy assigns to feminine qualities. If society placed a higher value on feminine qualities, then there would be less gender oppression. In this way, the volume should be ‘turned up’ on all forms of gender expression – androgyny, femininity, masculinity, and multiple forms of gender expression that is – or is not – congruent with biological sex.

Marxist/Socialist Feminism



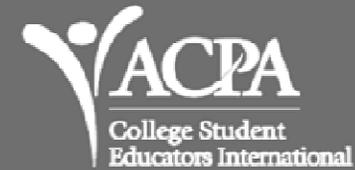
- This lens on feminism incorporates perspectives of social justice as well as socioeconomic differences.
- For many centuries women were considered the property of men and a key cog in the capitalist machine from a commodities perspective.
- Marxist feminists argue that the path to gender equality is led by the destruction of our capitalist society. This perspective speaks out to issues such as unequal pay, obstacles to achieving tenure or excelling in certain fields, and the frequent lack of family-friendly policies at many of the institutions and national organizations of higher education.
- Socialist feminists purport that women can only achieve true freedom when working to end both economic and cultural oppression.

Black/Womanist Feminism



- Wheeler (2002) defined a Black feminist as
a person, historically an African American woman academic, who believes that female descendants of American slavery share a unique set of life experiences distinct from those of black men and white women... the lives of African American women are oppressed by combinations of racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism. (p. 118)
- The term Womanist is often used to describe the experiences of a woman of color, including the intersections of race and gender.
- The Black Womanist feminism (or Black Feminist Thought) movement comes out of the feminist movement of the 1970's and is a direct interface with the civil rights movement, as it recognizes that women of African descent in the U.S. faced a unique set of issues that were not being addressed by the predominantly white feminist movement.

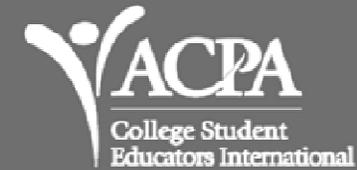
Chicana Feminism



Chicana feminism is in various stages of development . . . It is recognition that women are oppressed as a group and are exploited as part of la Raza people. It is a direction to be responsible to identify and act upon the issues and needs of Chicana women. Chicana feminists are involved in understanding the nature of women's oppression. (Nieto Gómez, 1971, p. 9)

- The *El Movimiento* drew strong in the 1960's and 1970's. Chicana feminism was cast as a threat to the notion of *la familia* and the “institution of Machismo”.
- Chicana feminism was often viewed as a divisive force. Men, and some women, construed the feminist perspective as a threat that came from outside, from white women, and not necessarily relevant to the Chicana community.
- With the growth of Chicana feminist awareness and liberation grew a questioning of the “machismo” perspective, discrimination in education, the role of the Catholic Church, and the ways in which the culture continued to repress women.

Native American Feminism



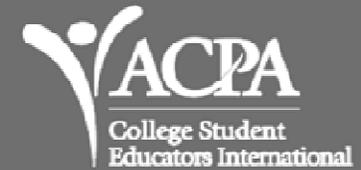
For Native American women, the struggle for survival has specific challenges since the colonizing culture (western culture) brought misogyny with it and all the religious, social, and judicial restraints a woman-persecuting society engenders. Therefore, not only do Native American women have to face the battles any colonized people must meet, but they must fight the beliefs that render them subordinate because they are women. This dynamic runs entirely counter to the historic and cultural beliefs of gynocratic indigenous people, so the blow to women because of their gender is particularly severe. (Sellers, 2008, p. 107)

- Native American feminism addresses sexism and promotes indigenous sovereignty simultaneously.
- This perspective places a focus on the preservation of cultural identity and the role women play within the tribe as the keepers of that identity, thus insuring the culture is subsequently passed on to future generations.



- Lingyan Yang (2003) defines Asian American feminism as “paying particularly [sic] attention to Asian American women’s voices, texts, experiences, literature, arts, visual arts, histories, geography, theory, epistemology, pedagogy, sexuality, body and life” (p. 141).
- It includes women in the U.S. whose ancestors are from a number of countries throughout Asia (including East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia) as well as multi-racial women.
- Throughout centuries of colonization, Western values and educational norms were pressed upon Indigenous people and educational systems of South and East Asia, the Americas, Africa and Australia.
- Postcolonial researchers and philosophers continue to re-examine the relationships between oppressor and oppressed, from invasion and conquest, to anti-colonial resistance, to the ongoing legacy of dominance.

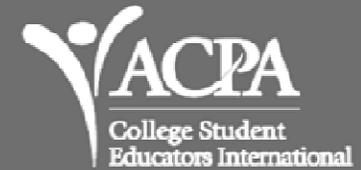
Arab American Feminism



It should be made clear – as history and empirical research attest – that the feminisms Muslim women have created are feminisms of their own. They were not “Western;” they are not derivative. Religion from the very start has been integral to the feminisms that Muslim women have constructed, both explicitly and implicitly. (Badran, 2009, p. 2)

- Arab American feminism often addresses key issues of politics and modernity, East/West relations, religion, colonization, and relationships between and across gender and class.
- Muslim women have historically favored two major feminist paradigms: Secular feminism and Islamic feminism.

Existential Feminism



- *Simone de Beauvoir* (1952) developed another conceptualization of feminism – existentialist feminism.
- This type of feminism puts forth the knowingly controversial idea that prostitution empowers women both financially and within the general hierarchy of society. When compared to Marxist and socialist feminism, the contrast with this type of entrepreneurial spirit is distinct.
- Central to this perspective is the concept that one is not born a woman but becomes a woman. *de Beauvoir* emphasizes that women must transcend their natural position and choose economic, personal, and social freedom.

Multicultural Feminism



- Multicultural feminists suggest that in a nation like the United States every woman has different intersecting identities and therefore, is not alike with any other woman.
- This lens on feminism takes into account a number of different interconnected identities and influences; it is sometimes utilized as an umbrella through which many various perspectives can be considered.
- Notably, some argue that this is not a useful umbrella for myriad feminist perspectives that are historically and culturally distinct, as it collapses groups and divorces itself from a focus on a specific race, geographic region, and/or unifying language.



- Eco Feminism is the recognition of the common ground in both feminism and environmentalism.
- This is a natural pairing as eco feminists argue that there is a correlation between the destruction of the planet and the exploitation of women worldwide by the patriarchy.
- This particular area of feminism intersects with issues of socioeconomic privilege, speciesism, and racism.
- Eco feminists contend that both the destruction of the planet and its inhabitants are at stake, and the only way to avert these disasters is through taking a feminist perspective of the world.

Postmodern Feminism



- This lens on feminism originated out of what some term the “third wave” of feminism.

Olson (1996) stated that postmodern feminists,

see female as having been cast into the role of the Other. They criticize the structure of society and the dominant order, especially in its patriarchal aspects. Many Postmodern feminists, however, reject the feminist label, because anything that ends with an “ism” reflects an essentialist conception. Postmodern Feminism is the ultimate acceptor of diversity. Multiple truths, multiple roles, multiple realities are part of its focus. There is a rejectance of an essential nature of women, of one-way to be a woman. (p. 19)



Classroom Exercise

Small Group Discussions (30 Minutes)

Instructions: Divide the class into small groups. Discuss the following questions:

- Which feminist perspective/s resonated with you the most and why?
- Some say “feminism” is “the other ‘F’ word” – what are the positive / negative definitions of feminism on campuses today?
- How do you define feminism?
- In what ways does feminism, sexism and/or patriarchy show up on your campus (e.g. what are individual actions, specific organizations, and/or institutional policies, that you can identify; what is the gender of your academic deans vs. student affairs deans)?
- In what ways can men and transgender people be feminists?

Classroom Exercise

Strategies for Change (30 Minutes)

Instructions: Since sexism has many different manifestations, there are many ways to can work against it in our own lives. Take some time to brainstorm:

1. The various ways people have worked for women's rights and social change throughout history, including contemporary society.
2. The various ways to address "individual/interpersonal" sexism on your college campus.
3. The various ways to address sexism "institutional" and/or "societal/cultural" sexism on your college campus.

(Adams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P., 2007)

Interactive Discussion toward Action

Discussion Questions:

1. What action do you want to take to interrupt or combat sexism on your campus?
2. What resources or materials, if any, would you need to achieve the goal?
3. What hazards or risks are involved? (If too risky, such as you might lose your job and you need your current income for survival, then go back to the beginning & select again).
4. What obstacles might you encounter?
5. What supports do you have?
6. Where could you find more support?
7. How might you measure or evaluate success?

(Adams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P., 2007)

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