

# Feminist Pedagogy From Pre-Access to Post-Truth: A Literature Review

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*Abstract: This paper traces the development of feminist pedagogy from its origins in liminal spaces where women came together to discuss their experiences, to a revolution of the male-dominated postsecondary curriculums of the 1960s, to its current form as a contested classroom and community pedagogy that intentionally troubles, politicizes, and transforms educational experiences. While feminist pedagogy originated as a process of consciousness raising and teaching about feminist issues, it has become a pedagogy that has been adapted in diverse settings; what remains consistent is the mindful consideration of the various methods, styles, and strategies of feminist pedagogy. In addition to synthesizing the literature on feminist pedagogy, I discuss various connections to other pedagogies and to social and cultural phenomena that have shaped feminist theory and practice. Finally, I argue that the contemporary state of feminist pedagogy is simultaneously implicated and threatened in a post-truth world.*

*Keywords : Feminist Pedagogy, Literature Review, Post-Truth*

## Introduction

The last literature review on feminist pedagogy was published over twenty years ago (Forrest & Rosenberg, 1997) and was focused in the field of psychology. Since the review, considerable change has followed in feminist pedagogy, activism, and scholarship, and the political and cultural climate surrounding them. Numerous edited collections of essays and research have emerged on feminist pedagogy (e.g., Crabtree et al., 2009; Light et al., 2015), yet a gap exists in a single paper that traces its evolution. The present article is a literature review of feminist pedagogy that integrates relevant social, cultural, and political phenomena. It is situated within a North American context in that the majority of the literature and surrounding contextual discussions are from the US and Canada.

This literature review is not meant to be exhaustive. An exhaustive review would be unmanageable, given the magnitude of feminist pedagogy publications. It is, however, intended to include notable and relevant works of feminist pedagogy, numerous examples of associated theory and research, and to connect scholarship to significant historical issues and events. Maxwell (2006) advocates for literature reviews that present “an accurate and sophisticated review of the relevant theoretical and research literature” (p. 28). The present literature review takes this even further by infusing the social, political, and cultural matters that have impactful relationships with the scholarly literature, in this case on feminist pedagogy.

Feminist pedagogy is a contested term, partly because of its interdisciplinary nature, and partly because feminism is also a contested term. I use the term feminist pedagogy not to denote singularity, but rather to refer to a set of philosophies, principles, and practices that are grounded in feminist theory. Moreover, the vast majority of the literature I explored and synthesized used the term pedagogy rather than pedagogies. While neither is inaccurate, the first may be interpreted as a single, universally agreed upon pedagogy among feminists, which it is certainly not. Just as feminism and feminist theory are multi-faceted undertakings, so is feminist pedagogy. As will be discussed later, the early feminism movement was criticized for attending mainly to white, middle-class woman (hooks, 1981). The way I conceive of feminism in this paper is as a broad term used by different groups of women to stand for their community’s needs, and as something that will collectively better the lives of all women. Furthermore, feminist pedagogy is a project and process that is unfinished, continuously evolving, and that holds various meanings that can shift with time and in relation to social, cultural, and political phenomena.

The term pedagogy itself does not have a singular definition. Pedagogy refers not only to teaching practices, but also to the social structures and political dimensions of education. Crabtree et al. (2009) identify the three components of pedagogy as curriculum, instruction, and practices of assessment and evaluation. Feminist theory and practice focus on a variety of issues including social and ideological change, equitable access to institutions and programs, curricular transformation, climate justice, and pedagogy. The focus of this literature review is feminist pedagogy, however, as Briskin and Coulter (1992) rightfully point, it “cannot be understood in isolation from the other major concerns that have preoccupied feminist educators and activists” (p. 247). The issues that concern feminists often inform what they study and how they teach. Fundamental to this is that feminist scholars often believe that theory and practice cannot and should not be separated (Brown, 1992; hooks, 1994).

## Historical Origins

The feminist movement began over three hundred years ago and has since developed along with varying social, cultural, and political events and issues. The women's suffrage movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century advocated for a variety of goals, including the right to vote and access to education (Crawford, 2001). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, access campaigns resulted in girls and women winning the right to attend secondary and postsecondary schools. The *Women's Liberation Movement* of the late 1960s, which grew out of a struggle for civil rights, had a substantial influence on women and girls' access to education and the beginning of women's studies in the US. In 1972, the US Congress passed Title IX as part of the Education Amendments to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The act, which applies to schooling from kindergarten to postgraduate levels, "prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender in educational institutions receiving federal financial assistance" (Valentin, 1997, p. 124). Title IX changed the landscape for women and access to education in the US. In 1974, the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) was passed "to make education more equitable for girls and women by providing incentives and guidance to schools and community groups" (Valentin, 1997, p. 127). In addition to gendered discrimination, barriers to access include male-dominated curricula and hierarchical power relations in the home that create greater domestic labour for women (Gaskell & McLaren, 1987). A major barrier to access that continues to have a significant impact on women's education is the issue of sexual violence on postsecondary campuses, which has received more attention in the past two decades than ever before. As early as 1957, one of the first published studies about campus sexual assault, *Male Sex Aggression on a University Campus* was published in the *American Sociological Review* (Kirkpatrick & Kanin, 1957). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, highly esteemed journals publish feminist research on sexual violence on campuses around the world. It is only in recent years that the magnitude of the issue of sexual violence on campuses was recognized, particularly following the "viral" Harvey Weinstein Scandal and the #MeToo movement.

The Women's Liberation Movement also brought public awareness to the nonexistence of women and the feminine in university curriculums, the denied status of women as meaning makers, and unequal relationships between men and women in the classroom. Women's studies courses were created to address the slim presence of women's contributions to the social sciences, the humanities, and the sciences. The first women's studies course was taught by Australian feminist Madge Dawson in 1956 (Kaplan et al., 2004). Dawson's course, "Women in a Changing World," focused on the socioeconomic and political status of women in western Europe. However, it was not until 1969 that the first women's studies course in the US was taught. In the same year, women's consciousness raising groups at San Diego State University organized and held rallies, petitions, and unauthorized presentations with the goal of beginning an accredited women's studies program (Boxer, 1982). In 1970, they succeeded and the first women's studies program in the US was established. In conjunction with Women's Liberation Movement, students and community members created the ad hoc committee for women's studies. By the end of the 1970s, women's studies courses had become more widespread in the US, Canada, the UK, and other parts of Europe (Browne, 2016).

Women's studies gradually became a discipline with a permanent academic presence that has its own epistemologies, theories, and methodologies. With the beginning of women's studies courses in universities came an influx of feminist educators theorizing pedagogy. Gore (1990) identified two types of feminist pedagogy that emerged in the 1980s, each leading back to the institutional backgrounds of its authors. Writers that were located in departments of women's studies tended to emphasize instructional strategies, while those who worked in schools of education tended to emphasize a feminist social vision. Missing in Gore's discussion is feminist pedagogues from departments of psychology (e.g., Weisstein, 1971) and sociology (e.g., Cook & Fonow, 1986) that also appeared in the 1970s and 1980s, and whose work has considerably informed feminist theory and praxis. Further, it is noteworthy that early feminist pedagogy did not have the theoretical leaders in the same ways that critical pedagogy had Freire, Giroux, and Shor. This is perhaps a tribute to the feminist tenet of democratic thinking.

In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist scholars and educators began to re imagine mainstream curriculums that reinforce and maintain sexist oppression. One of the ways feminists critiqued mainstream curriculums was by bringing up the issue of curricular proliferation of White, middle- to upper-class, male scholars taught in the traditional classroom (Andersen, 1987). Major to this was the issue that male professors have historically outnumbered female professors in universities (Samson & Shen, 2018). However, the ratio of female-to-male professors has increased markedly since the 1970s (Samson & Shen). There are now more women than ever before teaching in the academy. This historical discrepancy impacted how things are taught and what is taught in universities. Curricular bias that makes invisible power and privilege can be found in the conceptual frameworks of

established scholarship (Warren, 1989). “An oppressive conceptual framework is one in which the basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions are used to justify and maintain the subordination of one group by another” (Warren, 1989, p. 46). Warren notes that feminists are particularly interested in critiquing patriarchal conceptual frameworks that value what is conventionally male over what is conventionally female. Hall and Sandler (1982) found that the climate of postsecondary education is a “chilly one for women,” in which men talk more than and often interrupt women, and that faculty reinforce this climate. Feminist educators unmasked sexist, racist curriculum content and advocated for curricular transformation that included diversity of experiences and voices, particularly those which had been historically marginalized and dismissed.

Early feminist teachers discussed the unique concerns with which they struggled in their efforts to instill feminist principles into their teaching processes and methods. These publications modelled the feminist custom of writing to understand and to work through experience, to give value to a way of knowing that is personal. They paved the way for feminist educators to participate in the scholarship of teaching and learning by documenting their experiences, critiquing traditional educational practice, and implementing new ways of teaching. Feminist pedagogues not only politicize curriculum, but also point out the complex, nuanced, and multifaceted issues that come up in classrooms in which the curriculum is political in nature.

## Key Tenets

By the mid-1980s, feminist educators began documenting their teaching experiences and theorizing a distinctive, feminist pedagogy. Fisher (1981) published an essay on feminist pedagogy in *Radical Teacher*, in which she noted that “feminist pedagogy represents an important effort to incorporate some of the central features of the women’s movement into the work of teaching” (p. 20). The journal *Feminist Teacher* released its first volume in 1984, and by the end of the 1980s had published over one hundred articles. Feminist pedagogy was compared to and distinguished from other pedagogies, such as critical pedagogy. Clear definitions of feminist pedagogy, its vision and its tenets, began to emerge.

## Power Relations

Feminist pedagogy explores power relations and how they are negotiated in everyday practice, within the classroom, and beyond it. Feminist scholars explore power relations as intersectional and based in multidimensional experiences of systemic domination (Collins, 2015). “Feminists believe that teachers and educators must resurrect the lost ‘personal authorities’ of those who have been silenced by traditional educational practices,” explain Forrest and Rosenberg (1997, p. 87). To do so, feminist pedagogues often engage in complex understandings of positionality and practices of reflexivity.

In 1994, Black feminist writer bell hooks wrote one of the pioneering works in feminist pedagogy, *Teaching to Transgress*, when she began working as a professor in New York City. Hooks’ ideas built on feminist pedagogy by introducing the idea of engaged pedagogy, one that encourages students to become engaged members in the classroom and the social world. Hooks revealed the broader social, economic, and political structures that maintain unequal race, class, and gender relations, and discusses how education maintains these structures. Likewise, Forrest and Rosenberg (1997) explained that feminists see the classroom as a microcosm of oppressive social structures. Hooks (1994) argued that teachers choose to teach certain subject matters, infused with specific biases and values, and, at the same time, choose to overlook others.

Additionally, part of this tenet is the feminist tradition of addressing the power dynamics between teacher and student. According to Shrewsbury (1987), feminist pedagogy begins with “a vision of the classroom as a liberatory environment in which we, teacher-student and student-teacher, act as subjects, not objects” (p. 6). As such, a feminist approach to education places the learner at the centre of learning and facilitates the process by which the learner takes an active role to negotiate meaning and understanding.

In addition, feminist educators trouble traditional notions of teacher power, authority, and sole knowledge proprietor. Feminist teachers have employed strategies such as giving and receiving feedback (e.g., Rosser, 1990) and shared decision making for course content and evaluation. These strategies give power to students, particularly those who have traditionally been marginalized in the academy. In addition, feminist educators value the student-teacher relationship as a central component of learning. Roffman (1994) described the student-teacher relationship

as “the breeding ground for constructing and reconstructing meaning” (p. 82). The intentional construction of unauthoritative learning environments is a common practice for feminist pedagogues.

### **Ways of Knowing: Emotion, Narrative, and Lived Experience**

Feminist teachers encourage critical thinking, appreciate narrative and life experiences, and acknowledge emotion as central to meaning-making (Warren, 1989). Feminist pedagogy involves resisting dichotomies and rigid boundaries in education. Maher (1985) writes of this: “Reason and emotion, thinking and feeling, and public and private roles and experiences are all valid ways of making sense of the world. Rather than being opposed to one another... different modes of understanding should inform each other” (p. 188). Discomfort, resistance, and anger are among the emotions that feminist pedagogues theorize as part of the learning process.

Feminist pedagogues value the merging of intellectual and political pursuits with personal, embodied experiences. For example, hooks (1994) argued it is important to teach students that conflict is a necessary and unavoidable part of both education and life, and to teach students to think of conflict as a space for change and growth, rather than anger, violence, and fear. According to hooks, a classroom should be “a place where difference could be acknowledged, where we could finally understand, accept, and affirm that our ways of knowing are forged in history and relations of power” (p. 30). Orr (1993), who theorized male resistance to learning about gendered power relations, explained that educators should guide male students to realize that patriarchal power is simultaneously a source of privilege and a source of pain and loss. While Orr provided a strategic analysis of male resistance, she and Lewis (1990) cautioned against prescriptive feminist teaching strategies. “The classroom is alive and each one has its own personality, a function of the individual needs, desires, interests, and commitments of its students and teacher(s)” (Orr, 1993, p. 252).

### **Social Action**

Early definitions of feminist pedagogy included considerable discussion about the importance of social action as an important component of feminist learning experiences (Weiler, 1988). hooks (1994) and other scholars (Briskin & Coulter, 1992) have pointed out that feminist pedagogy is a communal, collective, and cooperative pedagogy. Feminist teachers often plan and facilitate student-led consciousness-raising projects (Naples, 2002). By emphasizing the role of consciousness raising in social change, feminist pedagogy keeps connected to its roots in the women’s movement.

Weiler stated that “for feminists, the ultimate test of knowledge is not whether it is true according to an abstract criterion, but whether or not it leads to progressive change” (p. 63). Similarly, Briskin and Coulter (1992) pointed out that feminist pedagogues see the classroom as both a site of inequality and a site of political change. They write, “feminism recognizes education as both a site for struggle and as a tool for change making” (p. 249). Forrest and Rosenberg (1997) define feminist pedagogy as “the infusion of feminist values into the process and methods of teaching” (p. 179). Since social change is an important feminist goal, a key tenet of feminist pedagogy is the infusion of social action projects, through consciousness raising and other acts of resistance, into educational experiences.

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, the women’s movement brought the issue of violence against women into the forefront of law, policy, and education (Fitzgerald, 1993). With feminist activists’ continued efforts to change campus climates for women, postsecondary curriculum designed to address sexual violence in higher education has continued to emerge in the past three decades (McMahon & Banyard, 2012; Muehlenhard et al., 2016). Feminist teachers have been at the forefront of the activism, research, and pedagogy of sexual violence. A feminist pedagogy of sexual violence considers not only sex and gender, but also race, class, and other bases of oppression (Bertram & Crowley, 2012). Feminist postsecondary educators have focused on social change as a guiding principle of transforming institutions that condone and perpetuate sexual violence (Banyard et al., 2009).

### **Feminist Methodology**

Feminist methodology has continued to have a mutually influential relationship with feminist pedagogy; naturally, both are informed by feminist epistemology and theory. For example, reflexivity and the politicizing of the personal is a key tenet of both feminist methodology and pedagogy. Feminist pedagogy became what it is because feminist

educators critically reflected on their work and authored essays, books, and research articles detailing accounts of their experiences. Furthermore, feminist educators have often researched their pedagogies using feminist methodologies.

Michelle Fine's (1992) work on participatory action research was informed by feminist theory and pedagogy and her work in schools. The principals of Fine's work are often used by educators to conduct research into their teaching practice. For example, Capobianco (2007) conducted action research in conjunction with narrative inquiry to investigate how feminist pedagogy can function in the secondary science classroom. Meanwhile, Brown and Gilligan's *The Listening Guide* (1993) has influenced certain strategies of feminist pedagogy while simultaneously serving as a method of understanding education through student narratives. For example, Woodcock (2005) shared the story of a "struggling" adolescent student, Tara, and used the feminist methodology of *The Listening Guide* to analyze and tell Tara's story. Woodcock shared Tara's story, shedding light on the relational dimensions of knowledge construction in the classroom, as well as the controlling contexts of school environment.

Schettino (2016) used Brown and Gilligan's *The Listening Guide* (1993) to as an analytical method in her study on a feminist relational pedagogy of mathematics. She sought to address the gap in adolescent mathematical achievement (Lloyd et al., 2005; Mullis et al., 2005) by countering traditional methods of teaching mathematics, which tend to be procedural, individualistic, competitive, distant, and objective. Schettino and two other teachers collaborated to create classroom environments that value student voice, curiosity and inquiry; reciprocity and a communal responsibility for learning; shared rather than hierarchal authority in the classroom; and flexible ways of viewing knowledge. Capobianco (2007) and Schettino's (2016) studies exemplify unique ways that feminist methodology is used in the classroom as pedagogy. In later sections, I explore more examples of feminist pedagogy as implemented in diverse areas.

## **In Relation to Other Pedagogies**

### **Critical Pedagogy**

In the 1980s and 1990s, feminists began to critique critical pedagogy. Deriving from critical theory, critical pedagogy is simultaneously a social critique pioneered by Antonio Gramsci, Peter McLaren, Henry Giroux and a series of instructional strategies discussed by Paulo Freire and Ira Shor. One of the most popular definitions of critical pedagogy was provided by Shor (1992):

Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse. (p. 192)

There are innumerable similarities between feminist and critical pedagogy, and many educators practice both. Some of the ideas of feminist pedagogy, such as critical consciousness, have underpinnings that root back to critical pedagogy. At the same time, critical pedagogues often credit feminist theory as an important part of critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2004). Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) introduced the idea of a critical consciousness, an idea that would be used by critical and feminist pedagogues and scholars for decades to come. For instance, Forrest and Rosenberg (1997) wrote that feminist pedagogy is committed "to the development of a critical consciousness empowered to apply learning to social action and social transformation" (p. 57). Other scholars agree that the foundations of feminist pedagogy are derived from critical pedagogy. An example of this is Crabtree and colleagues (2009), who define feminist pedagogy as "a set of assumptions about knowledge and knowing, approaches to content across disciplines, teaching objectives and strategies, classroom practices, and instructional relationships that are grounded in critical pedagogical and feminist theory" (p. 2). It is crucial to point out, however, that not all feminists agree that feminist pedagogy is grounded in critical theory. In fact, early feminists found that the foundations of both critical theory and pedagogy are male dominated, and that critical pedagogy lacked a sophisticated gender analysis (Brookes, 1990; Luke, 1992).

In 1989, feminist pedagogue, Elizabeth Ellsworth, wrote a compelling critique of critical pedagogy. Analyzing the issues of empowerment, student voice, dialogue, and critical reflection, Ellsworth argued that critical pedagogy

is based on assumptions that give rise to repressive myths. If these assumptions, implicit power dynamics, and knowledge production and validation go unchallenged, critical pedagogy will continue to perpetuate the very power dynamics it seeks to break, noted Ellsworth. Likewise, in Luke and Gore's 1992 collection of articles on *Feminism and Critical Pedagogy*, several authors identify the concepts of power, citizenship, and voice as signifiers in critical pedagogy that feminist pedagogues have historically challenged. Of particular note is Ellsworth's troubling of the notion of voice in critical pedagogy. She argued that while the critical classroom is the space in which we teach and learn about power and privilege, we fall short in turning the dialogue onto the bodies in the classroom and problematizing how power and privilege play out in the voices that inhabit it. She further noted that "any voice is often a contradictory intersection of voices" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 312). Students' voices have multiple dimensions of power, privilege, and embodied experience.

One of critical pedagogy's central contributions is the idea that democratic dialogue is a key part of liberatory education (Friere, 1970; Giroux, 2004). However, feminist educators such as Ellsworth (1989) have pointed out that critical pedagogy does not adequately address the notion that power dynamics exist in the classroom that threaten unity and make democratic dialogue impossible. Rakow (1992) stated that "classrooms are not and can never be neutral sites for the production and reproduction of knowledge" (p. 10). As such, feminist critiques of critical pedagogy involve cautioning educators to the danger of equalizing all voices in the classroom under the guise of democratic education. As McLeod (1994) explains, "assuming the equal legitimacy of all present positions can be a form of sugar-coating for an inequitable status quo" (p. 192). Boler (2004) similarly states that "not all voices are created equal" (p. 4); that "different voices carry different weight" (p. 11), and that educators have an obligation to moderate classroom dynamics by being attentive to certain utterances.

While some scholars (e.g., Scerif, 1997) conflate critical and feminist pedagogy and falsely assume that feminist pedagogy is simply an offshoot of critical pedagogy, others see the two as separate but complimentary and conforming (e.g., Weiler, 1991). Still, others express feminist pedagogy is at odds with critical pedagogy (e.g., Ellsworth, 1989; Luke & Gore, 1990). I argue that feminist pedagogy has some tenets that are similar to and others that are quite different from, and at times contradicting to those of critical pedagogy. Important to this is the point that feminist pedagogues tend to be more interested in the embodied nature of learning (Cachon, 2016) than are critical pedagogues. Whereas scholars of critical pedagogy often focus more on the interrogation of institutional structures such as policy, curriculum, and text, feminist theorists center the notion that critical perspectives on systemic domination are not only theoretical, but embodied ideas. For example, to study sexism and racism is an embodied undertaking, wherein women and students of colour are not merely the object of study; rather, all students in the classroom, with their intersectional identities and respective powers and privileges, are subjects of culture, and are all implicated in the phenomena being studied. Critical pedagogues, however, fall short in that they seem to focus more on the cognitive aspects of "critical consciousness," rather than the bodily, affective, and embodied nature of critical learning.

### **Associated/Intersecting Pedagogies**

Feminist theory has historically centered white, middle-class women, while leaving other experiences of womanhood on the margins. Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991; see Collins, 2015, for a synthesis) emerged from these criticisms and with it came a variety of analytical categories to understand women's lives. Most feminist pedagogues recognize the significance of intersectionality and how it plays out in feminist learning spaces (Case, 2016). They actively encourage teachers to examine the various hardships experienced by classroom participants based on multiplicative layers of marginalized identity.

Various pedagogies have emerged out of the criticism that feminism does not represent all communities equally. Feminist pedagogy as an evolving praxis continues to be informed by such alternative ways of approaching education. While some have been claimed along with feminist pedagogy, others are offshoots of it, and still others have deviated on their own. Among several others, pedagogies that relate and/or intersect with feminist pedagogy include Black feminist pedagogy (Omolade, 1987), anti-racist pedagogy (Kailin, 2002), Indigenous or Red pedagogy (Grande, 2008), and decolonial pedagogy (Lugones, 2010; Wane & Todd, 2018).

In the late 1970s, Audre Lorde marked out key discussions of the coming decades by considering categories of social difference in her social analysis (see Lorde, 1984, for a collection of essays). Bell Hooks' 1981 book, *Ain't I a Woman*, called attention to the slim presence of Black women in feminism. In 1987, educator and organizer Barbara

Omolade, published *A Black Feminist Pedagogy*, which “sets forth learning strategies informed by Black women’s historical experience with race/gender/class bias and the consequences of marginality and isolation” (p. 31). She suggested that feminist educators not attempt to remove discomfort and tension, but rather to create environments where students feel safe to make mistakes and take chances. Omolade (1987) wrote that feminist pedagogues ought to intentionally include Black women scholarship, usually absent, in their syllabi: “No one can teach students to ‘see,’ but an instructor is responsible for providing the windows, out of which possible angles of vision emerge from a coherent ordering of information and content.” (p. 38). Several Black feminist scholars have similarly centered the experiences of Black women in education (hooks, 1994; Lorde, 1981).

Another pedagogy that shares characteristics with feminist praxis is anti-racist pedagogy, which emerged out of critical theory and its subset, critical race theory. The key difference between the feminist pedagogy and anti-racist pedagogy is that while the first uses gender as the primary and most prominent lens of investigation, the latter uses race. In addition, the majority of scholarship on anti-racist pedagogy exists within a K-12 education context (e.g., Blakeney, 2005; Ohito, 2019), in contrast to feminist pedagogy holding salience in postsecondary education. Anti-racist pedagogy transpired when scholars and educators began criticizing multicultural pedagogy, characterized by a celebratory rather than critical model of analyzing difference (Kailin, 2002). It can be argued that anti-racist pedagogy is a relatively new praxis, one that may not have yet dealt with the criticisms of its fellow, critical pedagogy.

Tied to both anti-racist and feminist pedagogy are decolonial (Lugones, 2010; Wane & Todd, 2018) and Indigenous pedagogies (Grande, 2008). While the primary lens of feminist pedagogy is the analysis of gender, decolonial pedagogy differs in that it focuses more closely on the analysis of colonialism as deeply interlocked with gender and other social categories (Lugones, 2010). Patriarchy was perhaps the most important systemic tool that European settlers used to colonize the Indigenous people (Anderson, 2016). Lugones (2010) calls this “brutal imposition of the modern, colonial, gender system” (p. 743) on Indigenous societies and explains that colonialism cannot be understood without an analysis of gender. A fundamental part of this argument is that while white feminists have historically portrayed non patriarchal societies as utopian visions, Indigenous scholars point out that such societies actually existed in Indigenous societies prior to European colonization (Gunn Allen, 1993). Lugones (2010) theorizes a decolonial feminism, proposing that “the colonial imposition of gender cuts across questions of ecology, economics, government, relations with the spirit world, and knowledge, as well as across everyday practices that either habituate us to take care of the world or to destroy it” (p. 742).

Scholars who write about Indigenous and Red pedagogies often build their discussion on critical analyses of critical theory. Grande (2008) theorized a Red pedagogy, contending that while there is value in attempting to reconcile the goals of critical theory and Indigenous peoples, achieving this in the current state of affairs may endanger the goals of Indigenous peoples. She argued that critical theory and pedagogy do not fully consider how Indigenous identity is inextricably linked with political and cultural struggles for sovereignty (Grande, 2008). Principal to her argument was Grande’s (2000) assertion that “American Indian scholars view the issues of sovereignty and self-determination as the central questions of education, whereas critical scholars frame education around issues of democracy and greater equality” (p. 356). As such, central to Red and Indigenous pedagogies is Indigenous social and political goals, and the teaching of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. These pedagogies are often taught in women’s studies departments, and feminist pedagogues in recent years have demonstrated a strong interest in decolonial and Indigenous pedagogies. Nevertheless, calls for decolonizing feminist theory and pedagogy continue to emerge (Arvin et al., 2013).

## **Emergent Feminist Pedagogies**

Feminist pedagogy is most widely practiced and theorized in higher education, however it is not limited to the academy. Figure 1 is a concept map that illustrates the genealogy of feminist pedagogy as discussed throughout this article. The arrows do not represent chronology but rather influential connections, most of which are mutual. The emergent feminist pedagogies that I will discuss in this section are feminist pedagogy of schooling and feminist science pedagogy.

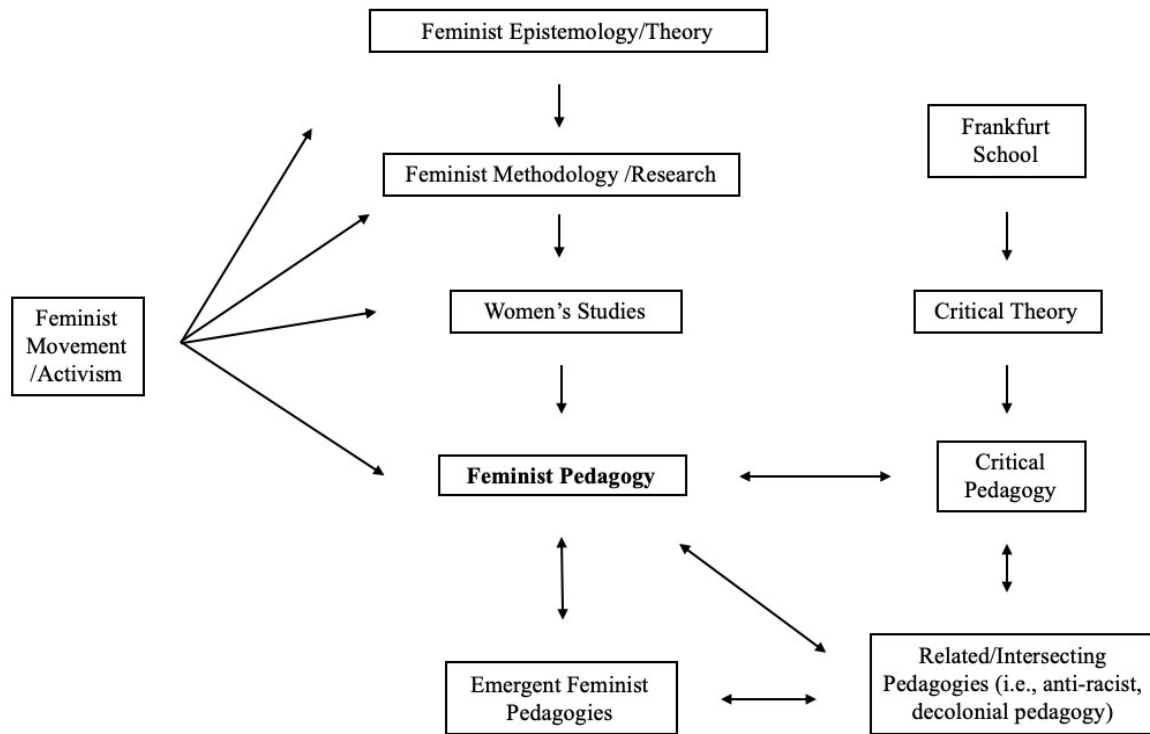


Figure 1: The genealogy of feminist pedagogy across relevant literature.

### Feminist Pedagogy of Schooling

Feminist pedagogues advocate for, among other things, the leveling of power relations between teacher and student, student agency, and critical reflection, some of which have been infused into teacher education in various ways. Further than teacher education, feminist approaches to education have emerged as valuable in school research and praxis. Feminist pedagogy also involves a critique of schooling as a site of cultural reproduction (Arnot, 2002). For example, feminist scholars have criticized the implicit sexist messaging around school dress codes and issue of disciplining girls whose dress patterns are “distracting” to boys (Harbach, 2015). This, in turn, reproduces sexist ideology and encourages girls to consistently surveil their bodies because of the gaze of their male peers (and educators).

Likewise, for decades, feminist scholars have theorized violence in the lives of girls and women and the role of schooling in gendered violence. They have pointed to the social, cultural, and political issues that are responsible for gendered violence and how they play out in schools. Some recent examples of this are Conroy (2013), who applied feminist theory to the study of sexual harassment in schools, and Gilbert (2018), who used a feminist pedagogical lens to problematize consent education. Meyer (2008) offered a feminist reframing of bullying in K-12 education. She made important points about the ways in which various forms of verbal harassment serve to maintain dominant hegemonic order. Meyer suggested that educators use the “stop and educate” strategy to intervene when they hear oppressive language being used. “In addition to setting the standards for acceptable language in the classroom, it is important for educators to provide information about why certain names are especially hurtful due to their biased meanings” (Meyer, 2008, p. 456). Feminists maintain that oppressive language is problematic in all contexts, that “all sexist thinking and action is the problem, whether those who perpetuate it are female or male, child or adult” (hooks, 2000, p. 1).

Digiovanni and Liston (2005) discussed a possibility of a deliberately feminist pedagogy in elementary education, one that troubles ways of knowing in the official curriculum and in the hidden curriculum. They argued that feminist pedagogy can be implemented in the elementary classroom in various ways: moving beyond token inclusions such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. when teaching about women and people of colour; using



inclusive reading materials that diversify experience; including conversations about gender and race that value lived experience; using narrative in the classroom. Digiovanni and Liston explained that it is feminist practice to work on developing strong relationships with students and between students. Teachers can do so in a variety of ways, including the usage of cooperative learning techniques and flexible groupings in which each group member has a valuable role. Moffatt and Norton (2005) presented a case for feminist pedagogy in reading education and popular culture, in which they argued that popular reading texts function to reproduce asymmetrical gender relations, but that they can also be used as vehicles to question dominant ideas of gender.

### **Feminist Pedagogy of Science**

A feminist pedagogy of science is an emerging pedagogy that has had increased relevancy in the past decade, particularly given calls for climate justice pedagogy. In the late twentieth century, scientists began to take interest in feminist politics and write about a feminist politic of science. Mayberry and Rees (1997) faulted traditional conceptualizations of science, which “fail to investigate the role of culture in the production, dissemination, and utilization of scientific knowledge” (p. 57). Feminist science scholar and physicist Karen Barad (1998) argued that feminist politics are not limited to gender issues, but are also concerned with the ontological and epistemological bases of scientific practices. Scientific knowledge, through the sociopolitical reverence of objectivity and empiricism, has been placed on an “epistemological pedestal” (Richmond et al., 1998, p. 898).

Mayberry and Rees (1997) wrote about a feminist approach to teaching earth science, in which they asked questions such as, “Are natural disasters really natural?” (p. 12). Similarly, Mayberry and Welling (2000) advocated for a feminist pedagogy of science:

By drawing attention to the intersectionality of culture and scientific knowledge, [feminist] scholarship encourages our students to raise critical questions about scientific knowledge, practice, and politics: Science for whom? Who benefits and who does not from the uses to which science is put? What roles do the historical, cultural, and social contexts, within which conventional science has developed and flourished, play in constituting content, practice, and use in the natural sciences? What are the specific ideologies and power relations (including but not limited to race, class, and gender ideologies) that are carried into scientific and feminist research? (p. 4–5)

Questions such as these illustrate a feminist politicization of science education that troubles the picture of science as objective and impartial. In one of the courses they taught called *Water: Resources, Politics and Society*, Mayberry and Welling asked students to consider the historical perspectives of different groups of people, from those of Indigenous peoples to white male settlers, on the human relationship to water. “The questions that we then ask consider what these ‘silenced views’ might offer technoscientific approaches for solving some of our modern crises surrounding water availability and quality” (p. 6). By allowing their students to consider the Indigenous perspective in scientific knowledge, Mayberry and Welling offered their students alternative way of understanding. This way of understanding also considers how social and cultural power relations function to privilege certain ways of scientific knowing while suppressing others. A feminist pedagogy of science may also involve an experiential learning component in which personal experiences provide a lens for subsequent discussions (Mayberry & Rees, 1997; Mayberry & Welling, 2000). Such activities involve discussions around social action in relation to science.

Researchers such as Richmond et al. (1998), have practiced feminist pedagogy in teacher science education. Their broader goal was to bring more women into science, and their more immediate goal was to guide students to rethink and re-envision science as political pursuit and thereby transform their pedagogies. Others have used feminist epistemologies to address “the question of how to teach science in ways that both acknowledge the cultural specificity of science and empower our students to engage in science constructively” (Brickhouse, 2001, p. 283). This involves transforming science curricula, which have historically been male-dominated, to reflect diverse voices, and carefully incorporating feminist pedagogical ideals such as a caring teacher-student relationship and valuing the role of emotion in science learning (Brickhouse, 2001).

Although I have not discussed all emergent forms of feminist pedagogy, I gave attention to the ones that have had much prominence in recent years, namely, the feminist pedagogy of schooling and feminist science pedagogy. In the next section, I will discuss the future of feminist pedagogy in what has come to be thought of as a post-truth world. I define the term post-truth and examine the implications on feminist theory and pedagogy.

## Feminist Pedagogy in a Post-Truth World

Scholars, journalists, and educators have begun to document what is commonly known as a post-truth world. Post-truth describes a cultural phenomenon in which truth is being challenged “as a mechanism for asserting political dominance” (McIntyre, 2018, p. xiv). Though scholars have debated if the post-truth era is an outcome or a consequence of the presidency of Donald Trump, the two are undeniably intimately tied together (McIntyre, 2018). The Trump era invigorates imperialist, capitalist, white supremacist ideology, and extreme partisan polarization (Boler & Davis, 2018). This has had the most profound effect on climate change awareness and policy, immigration, and war. However, post-truth thinking concerns feminist theories in a unique and pressing manner. One, feminist issues, such as sexual violence and abortion rights, have been deeply implicated in polarized debates. Two, feminist epistemologies are under threat in post-truth rhetoric.

Some scholars believe that post-truth stakeholders have used postmodernist thought to uphold their claims that there is no authority to truth (McIntyre, 2018). That truth is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. That anyone can claim truth, regardless of their training and needless of a built argument. What has emerged is a critical moment for feminist, postmodernist thinkers. The foundations of feminist postmodernist thought are thus simultaneously implicated and threatened by post-truth proponents. Feminist theory has historically valued alternative ways of knowing, learning, and claiming truth.

Feminist theory, like other contemporary approaches, validates differences, challenges universal claims to truth, and seeks to create social transformation in a world of shifting and uncertain meanings. In education, these profound shifts are evident on two levels: first, at the level of practice, as excluded and formerly silenced groups challenge dominant approaches of learning and to definitions of knowledge; and second, at the level of theory, as modernist claims to universal truth are called into question. (Weiler, 1991, 449–450)

Weiler’s argument exemplifies the ways in which postmodernist, feminist thinking involves calling truth into question and deconstructing dominant discourses. Such thinking can be interpreted as a collusion in post-truth rhetoric. However, post-truth rhetoric and feminist postmodernist thinking carry distinct intellectual and political genealogies. Whereas feminist postmodernism is interested in the ways truth and knowledge come to be, particularly in relation to power and dominance, social categories, and institutional systems, post-truth rhetoric upholds the idea that anyone can hold truth. Postmodernist ideals challenge the ways in which truth is created and sustained, however, a post-truth climate challenges the very existence of truth.

Feminist thinkers value emotion as a form of knowledge and truth; meanwhile, the post-truth phenomenon involves the distribution of knowledge creation authority to anyone, even those without the training or will to examine emotions as a shaping feature of truth. Emotions have always affected politics and media, however, in post-truth world, “there has been a shift in awareness of emotion as a determining factor” in politics and media (Boler & Davis, 2018, p. 75). Moreover, though feminist postmodernists value subjectivity, they do so in relation to transparency; while they value individual experience, they acknowledge its situatedness in the broader cultural, political, and institutional systems that inform it. Neither of these values exist in post-truth politics. Moreover, the question of how feminist theory and pedagogy can serve as antidotes to post-truth remains largely unexamined in the literature, with the exception of Steiner (2018), who suggested feminist standpoint epistemology as a way to solve the post-truth crisis in journalism.

Feminist pedagogues should be careful to consider the impacts of post-truth thinking in themselves and their learners. Post-truth rhetoric complicates learning dynamics and the notion of voice in learning environments. Illustrative of this is that in a post-truth world, feminist theory and research can be called into question in a manner that requires no argument or justification. Further impacts of post-truth on feminist pedagogy are numerous and include how post-truth politics affect women’s access to education. For instance, in late 2018, Betsy DeVos, Trump’s Secretary of Education, proposed major changes to Title IX that, if implemented, will threaten women’s experiences of safety in and thus access to education (Brown & Mangan, 2018).

Post-truth rhetoric is also linked to postfeminist and anti-feminist rhetoric that has emerged within the last decade. Notable figures in this realm, Caroline Kitchens, Wendy McElroy, Heather Wilhem, and Jordan Peterson, have articulated anti-feminist agendas and gained a significant following as a result. As an example, Peterson, a

psychology professor who has been deemed an “academic celebrity” (Kerr, 2018, n.p.), has denied the existence of patriarchal society, and often criticizes feminist ideas such as power, privilege, and goals, such as the troubling of toxic masculinity. Popular news media have often supported Peterson’s views (e.g., Young, 2018). Peterson has been especially articulate about his disapproval of the public funding of women’s studies programs in universities, “We’ve done enough public funding of that sort of thing” (Kerr, n.p.). Peterson’s views have received widespread attention and esteem, and his book, *12 Rules for Life*, has been a best seller. The most pressing consequence of public condemnation of women’s studies is the defunding of courses and programming, which is often attributed to budget cuts (Kerr, n.p.) rather than cultural politics. The reduction of women’s studies contributes to “the patriarchal stronghold on knowledge production,” which in turn “highlights structural institutional hierarchies and relations of power” (Christianakis, 2008, p. 102). In addition to affecting women’s access to education, post-truth politics affect spaces in which feminist pedagogy is practiced.

## Conclusion

Feminist educators continue to theorize a feminist pedagogy that pushes the boundaries of thinking, teaching, and learning. The purpose of this article was to trace the development of feminist pedagogy from its earliest articulation to its present form. It is common among scholars of literature reviews to include only current research and evade examining the origins of particular lines of scholarly thinking and the social, cultural, and political contexts of research; the aim of this paper was to carefully consider such contexts. I discussed feminist pedagogy’s emergence in relation to the activist movements such as the feminist movement, its key tenets, its relationships to critical and other pedagogies, its forms in different disciplines, and finally, its implications in post-truth politics.

While feminist pedagogy has its roots in consciousness raising groups and postsecondary women’s studies classrooms, today it is used throughout the academy, in K-12 education, and in the community. Feminist pedagogy can be seen as the troubling of dominant hegemonic educational practices that reinforce unequal power structures and maintain systems of domination, particularly patriarchy. Feminist pedagogues engage with not only the cognitive, but also the affective and embodied dimensions of teaching and learning. Feminist educators agree that we must critically engage in a continuous dialectic on how we teach, what we teach, and how structural forces of society and culture inform our teaching, with the common goal of social and political change. Feminist pedagogy has been transformative for teachers, learners, institutions, and societies, and will continue to be so as an ever-evolving project.

The majority of the issues discussed in this paper are within a North American context. Nevertheless, with the Internet comes a globalization of sociopolitical phenomena that makes them contextually relevant throughout the world. Post-truth, in particular, is a globalized phenomenon that has proliferated in the digital sphere. Feminist issues, such as sexual violence and the #MeToo movement, are also globalized. As a result, as it continues to progress, feminist pedagogy is incredibly relevant today.

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