

GCST1602

Introduction to Gender Studies

8/3/2017- Dr Jessica Ken

Lecture notes: Introduction- Starting from where we are (based on readings)

Contentions:

- In order for feminism to be effective we must recognise and admit to our contexts and biases
- Our sense of belonging in feminism is at fault if it only lies within histories, contexts, ideals and values that match our own
- Privilege, or lack of it, determines feelings of either belong or alienation
- Whilst our personal locations may be different we will always have unavoidable connections
- Unification based on generalisation and assumption of a shared location or disregard for difference can ultimately result in exclusion
- Our locations are diverse and complex and this manifests in many different ways

Adrienne Rich- Politics of Location (1986)

- There is unavoidable context and “a struggle for accountability” (211)
- Debate between avoiding our location of femaleness and the ownership and recognition of that (213)
- “Breaking down and down again the false male universe” (216)- the idea that a world directed by one ‘type’ of person creates a sense of falseness. Is this a skewed perspective or false? What would truth look like total representation or is that just a large mix of subjective thought?
- “The problem was that we did not know whom we meant when we said ‘we’” (217)
- Example of the female astronaut campaigning for large (corrupt and toxic) pharmaceutical companies to fund space travel suggests that even with equality women may destroy the world as men have
- There is a certain weight of claiming collectivity, “we are not the same. We who are many and do not want to be the same” (225)
- “All privilege is ignorant at the core” (226)
- The over occurring “Women have always” (in this case used by Woolf) ignores context, highlights habit to inflame the claims we have without regard for the impact of our words
- Often the “we” in social movements goes unrecognised e.g #metoo #timestup
- Cooperate profiteering on backs of social movements- what kind of feminism is it if it relies on the exploitation of other women
- Even a feminist moment may discriminate against others – one’s politics is central
- Who we are shapes our experiences, who we are not is easily forgettable e.g a white person feels on the outside in a room full of African American people but only when a minority

Linda Alcoff- The Problem of speaking for others (1992)

- Speaking for others may be “politically illegitimate” (6)
- Problem arises from
 - i) Our location inevitably influences our opinion
 - ii) Privilege is dangerous and if not careful speaking for others can reinforce oppression
- Do we have the responsibility to use our privilege to speak for others or move out? “keep silent or deconstruct my discourse” (8)
- Maybe we can use power to make spaces for voices that are oppressed
- The balance between speaking for others and speaking about others

- The words we use to speak about others also has meaning, I, we, they “to replace both I and we with a passive voice that erases agency results in an erasure of responsibility and accountability” (11)
- “We cannot make an epistemic evaluation of the claim without simultaneously assessing the politics of the situation” (15)
- One must also consider that interpretation of words are inevitable despite attempts at objectivity
- “retreat” response- no attempt at all to make comment
- BUT Alcoff says “it might be argued that the retreat from speaking for others can be maintained without sacrificing political effectivity if it is restricted to particular discursive spaces” (19)
- Even we speak for ourselves we are creating a representation. (21) so are we ever free from danger?
- Potential options:
 - i) Never speak
 - ii) Speak only about oneself
 - iii) Speak with attention to the motivation and impact of your speech (see below)
- IF we must speak for others: “concrete analysis”
 - i) Listen for information, don’t speak for mastery
 - ii) Confront our own subjectivity
 - iii) “Speaking should always carry with it an accountability and responsibility for what one says” = hear the criticism and act upon it
 - iv) Engage with the potential impact of our words
 - v) ASK YOURSELF “will it enable the empowerment of oppressed people?”

} Politics of retreat

The dangers of a single story- Chimimanda Adichie:

https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story#t-56637

15/3/2018 Dr Jessica Kean

Lecture: Intersectionality

Contentions

- The aspects of our life are inextricably linked, forming an intersect of unique and changeable identification
- The simple inclusion of difference by popular movements signals an ignorance of the complexity of intersectionality and an assumption of the white narrative as default
- An individual’s relationship with their gender, race, class and so on is influential in their formation of self and the stories they tell, regardless of whether they are marginalised on these bases
- Location and history ultimately dictate our relationship with social movement and willingness or lack thereof to engage “History shapes political alliances and affordances (Kean)
- Whilst white women have been oppressed, so too have they played an instrumental role in the oppression of indigenous women

Case study

- Map of world with dates in which women gained the right to vote
- Indigenous women marked with an *
- Popular movements letting themselves off the hook with disclaimer of an asterisk
- How do we count for the discrimination that happens on multiple levels?

When feminism says ‘we’ who does it actually mean? Through lens of Berhendt

"Some of us, calling ourselves radical feminists, never meant anything less by women's liberation than the creation of a society without domination; we never meant less than the making new of all relationships. The problem was that we did not know what we meant when we said 'we'" (Rich, p. 217)

"While white women and men of colour also experience discrimination, all too often their experiences are taken as the only point of departure for all conversation about discrimination" (Crenshaw, 2015, p. 3)

- Who are we pointing to? Must be attentive to difference within groups
- "Intersectionality was a lived reality before it became a term" (Crenshaw 2015, p. 3)
- People's identities are not unfaceted – more complicated than a singular term
- Example of Emma de Grapheny – "caught in intersection of these two forms of discrimination" (Kean) based on General Motors hiring black men and white women but not black women
- "Intersectionality has been the banner under which many demands for inclusion have been made" (Crenshaw) but not all demands under the banner and is not required for effectiveness
- Berhendt discusses oppression as more than the additions of factors (women +) but as "integral" – inextricably linked- her experience as a woman can't be separated from how she experiences race
- Experiences are different depending on context but white is default: white is just woman, black woman is black woman

Race is always already present in how people experience gender

Examples-

- Identities built into systems e.g female/ male – our categories are entrenched
- Assumption of universal beauty standards
- Women driving in Saudi Arabia
- Domestic violence relationships and assumption of coloured person to be guilty
- Black women seen as promiscuous
- Racial profiling
- Gender is racialized already- intersectionality recognises identities are multifaceted, not just those who are marginalised
- White womanhood is not neutral- need to mark the unmarked category so it is not seen as a default

Race present in experience of gender through- (Berhendt)

- Motherhood
- Sexuality
- Work and economic dependence
- Colonisation

"Aboriginal women were losing their right to be mothers; the right to be a mother was not an issue for white women who at this time were concerned with the right to choose whether or not to be a mother at all by agitating for access to safe contraception and securing safe abortions" (Berhendt 1993, p. 30)

Other groups who might have a different experience of relationship to choices and motherhood

AND sexuality and gender freedoms-

- Queer couples- legally and socially
- Single, young women
- China's one child policy and the disruption of family
- Disability: forced sterilisation- lack of perceived autonomy

"Aboriginal women are stereotyped differently to white women. Sexual liberation for white women has meant seeking the right to say "yes" to different sexual partners and different sexual relationships without condemnation. Aboriginal women are still seeking the right to say "no" and destroy the myth of the promiscuous, oversexed black woman."

(Berhendt, 1993, p. 30)

- E.g discussions around consent are happening but within the framework of white women- there remains a lack of autonomy for women of colour
- There is a noticeable silence around the priorities of minority groups