

**A New Feminist Consciousness: How Feminist Theory Has Changed My Outlook on
Everything**

Casey Hopper

Department of Sociology, Thompson Rivers University

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Dr. Jenny Shaw

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Introduction

When looking at something so broad as feminist theory, a short anthology is unable to encompass all the rich and diverse voices of what feminist theory is. At its core, feminist theory deconstructs and critiques systems of oppressions. In my life, learning feminist theory has shifted how I view myself, how I view others, and how I view the world around me. As a result of this new feminist consciousness, I see potential to make change in the future by incorporating feminist theory into my life. To create this anthology, I have curated the aspects of feminist theory that have resonated with me the most. To begin, I shall discuss different feminist stances. Second, I will discuss liberal feminism: a partially racist feminism. Lastly, I will discuss Red intersectionality and incorporating feminist theory in a counselling setting.

Different Feminist Stances

There are various streams of feminism. Firstly, there are liberal feminists, who were fighting for the right to vote (Mann & Patterson, 2015). Second, there are radical feminists, who sought to get rid of many forms of injustices while also attempting to eliminate forms of male domination (i.e., patriarchal powers oppressing women) (Mann & Patterson, 2015). Within the radical feminist movement, social norms and institutions were critiqued and abolished, and edgier forms of feminism appeared (Mann & Patterson, 2015). Lastly, black and indigenous feminist theorists were also incredibly influential and critiqued who the knowledge knowers traditionally are in society whilst critiquing the interwoven oppressions marginalized individuals face: intersectionality (Mann & Patterson, 2015). Overall, this is not an exhaustive list of all feminist perspectives; however, these perspectives provide a stepping stone for us to learn about the varying perspectives feminist theorists had.

Liberal Feminism: A Partially Racist Feminism

To begin, this movement can be explained as a reform-oriented political movement: concerned with changing the lives of women without critiquing the system in which women

live in (Mann & Patterson, 2015). Specifically, liberal feminist theorists did not critique the patriarchal and capitalist system that may have oppressed women (Mann & Patterson, 2015). This lack of critique of the patriarchal system we live in has led to problematic consequences today. For example, many women have a second shift that is unrecognized and undervalued. The second shift refers to, the household and childcare duties women must do after their work day (Wade & Ferree, 2018).

In addition, many liberal feminists had no analysis of capitalism as well as gender inequities (Mann & Patterson, 2015). In addition to liberal feminism lacking a critique of the capitalist and patriarchal system in which they lived in at the time, the women's suffrage movement did not critique the racial discrimination that occurred during this time in history. Interestingly, liberal feminists perpetuated racial stereotypes to progress their movement (Mann & Patterson, 2015). This was likely because of many liberal feminist positionalities in society. Importantly, there was a class and race bias, wherein most liberal feminists were white and middle class (Mann & Patterson, 2015).

Red Intersectionality

In contrast to liberal feminist thought, one large umbrella category of feminist thought is black and indigenous thought. When looking at feminist theory in general, it is crucial to question the context at which knowledge is created or the epistemology (Mann & Patterson, 2015). For example, who are the knowers and where is their placement in society. Are they speaking from a subjugated position and what is their level of privilege or power? Moreover, it is important to understand the historical context at which individual feminist theories are created (Mann & Patterson, 2015). According to standpoint theory, how we know knowledge matters and depends on how and where we are situated in society (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011). My prior knowledge of feminist theory was vague, and I was only aware of names such as Stanton. Although Stanton and other white feminists during the first wave of

feminism were incredibly influential, their voices were amplified at the cost of silencing individuals with less privilege (i.e. lesbian women and women of colour) (Mann & Patterson, 2015). Black and Indigenous thought provides a diverse and empowering narrative of what feminism truly is. Those positioned on the margins of society likely have a different perspective than those in a more privileged position (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011).

Specifically, those on the margins have a less obscured view and are better positioned to critique the status quo because those who are more privileged in the center do not experience as many oppressions (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011).

In Nathalie Clark's (2016) piece, "Red Intersectionality", she describes intersectionality and its origins from an incredibly insightful standpoint. Specifically, she argues that when we think about intersectionality origins we only think about Crenshaw and the Combahee River Collective; however, intersectionality was discussed widely by Indigenous women such as Zitkala-Sa (Clark, 2016). In addition, Clark (2016), explains that Red intersectionality represents the interwoven multiple oppressions individuals experience as a result of colonization. Clark's insight is influential and stresses the importance of colonial power and oppression of indigenous peoples. Similar to Clark's work, Vowel's (2016) piece, exemplifies the multiple oppressions Indigenous people face. Specifically, they explain Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people must work tirelessly to overcome the oppressions netted over them by settler colonialism (Vowel, 2016). This piece is incredibly moving and stresses the importance of a Red intersectionality perspective. Overall, Red intersectionality is a means to decolonize the profession of social work. One way in which Red intersectionality decolonizes social work is by empowering young indigenous girls to recognize their unique intersections of identities (Clark, 2016). Importantly, as an individual working in the mental health field, I think there are a lot of benefits being aware of our

multiple identities and how it is interwoven with systems of oppression. Specifically, using a Red intersectionality perspective in counselling and social work may be beneficial.

Feminist Theory and Counselling

In addition to Red intersectionality being incorporated into counselling and social work, Feminist theory in general should also be incorporated into counselling. We can learn a lot about ourselves and how we interact with our environment through feminist theory. Traditional psychotherapy has ignored and stigmatized a feminist perspective in therapy (Mann & Patterson, 2015). Specifically, Gilligan (2015) speaks out about the poor representation of women in psychology in her piece, "From in a Different Voice". As she describes, women and men in science are described as innately different beings; however, she argues this is due to how we are socialized (Gilligan, 2015). Gilligan's piece is incredibly insightful. Unfortunately, psychology in general has been created by men, for men, and at the cost of silencing women.

Moreover, Brown (2010) explains in, "Laura Brown on Feminist Therapy", the overall goals and perspectives of feminist psychotherapy. Specifically, feminist therapy describes that the root cause of dysfunction is directly a result of the patriarchal system we live in (Brown, 2010). Touching upon this issue of the system we live in causing dysfunction, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (Gilman, 2015) exemplifies this issue. For example, the main character represents the severe suffering of women as a result of a woman's place in society. Furthermore, Gilman's (2015) piece is extremely emotional and represents the collective consciousness of women feeling trapped.

In addition to Gilman's (2015) piece supporting Brown's (2010) description of feminist therapy and roots of dysfunction, Gilligan's (2015) piece, "From in a Different Voice", also follows a similar narrative about patriarchal systems we live in. Brown (2010) describes that because psychotherapy has a male bias or androcentric focus, in therapy

usually there is an, “absence of an analysis of gender and power, practiced in ways that can actively or inadvertently uphold problematic status quo’s and reinforce hierarchies of values inherent in dominant culture” (Brown, p. 5, 2010). Similarly to Gilligan’s (2015) work, Brown (2010) provides a critique of the patriarchal world we live in and how this may impact women negatively. Overall, both Brown and Gilligan critique the androcentric nature of therapy that largely goes unnoticed.

Comparably, Wyche and Rice (1997) discuss a similar theme in their piece, “Core Tenets of Feminist Therapy”. Specifically, Wyche and Rice (1997) provide a road map for feminist therapists. I find the values discussed in this piece are similar to my own; therefore, I am empowered by each and every tenet they propose. Specifically in Wyche and Rice’s (1997) piece they describe that, “feminist therapy empowers girls and women to recognize, claim, and embrace their individual and collective power as girls and women” (p.69). I find this tenet extremely inspiring. From my perspective, Wyche and Rice (1997) are encouraging feminist therapy clients to enact change on an individual or micro level, while also enacting change on a more macro level (i.e., through collective activism or protesting). As a prospective feminist therapist I think there is a lot of power in social activism for improving society as well improving a client’s self-empowerment, and thus well-being.

Importantly, clients may benefit from taking part in this activism in many ways. Moreover, activism may look different for many people. When I think of activism or resistance to social norms I think of Freeman’s (2015) piece, “The Bitch Manifesto”. Freeman (a radical libertarian) challenged the patriarchal and androcentric social structure she lived in. Specifically, in her piece she discusses the term bitch. This term was given to women who resisted against the strong forces of the patriarchy. Unfortunately, even today women who take part in social activism are described as being a bitch. Similar to Freeman’s

(2015) viewpoint of the term bitch, I believe women should be empowered by this rebellious term.

WHAT CAN A COUNSELLOR LEARN FROM FEMINIST THEORY

TEACH CLIENTS HOW CAPITALISM AND PATRIARCHY ARE INTERWOVEN SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION



REFLECT ON THE THERAPISTS' OWN PRIVILEGED STANDPOINT AND BIASES



PROVIDE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR CLIENTS TO SHARE THEIR VALUABLE EXPERIENCES OF OPPRESSION

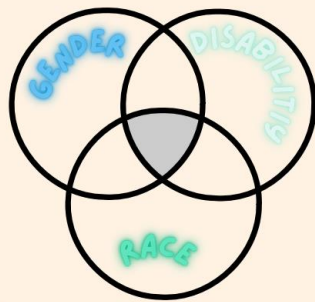


SAFE SPACES
for
EVERYONE



WHAT CAN A COUNSELLOR LEARN FROM FEMINIST THEORY

EXPLAIN TO CLIENTS THE INTERSECTIONS OF THEIR MULTIPLE IDENTITIES



INCORPORATE RED INTERSECTIONALITY INTO THERAPY



EMPOWER CLIENTS TO TAKE PART IN ACTIVISM



Conclusion: The Future of Feminism

As I look at feminist theory's advancement from first wave to present day feminism, I am proud of where we are as a society. However, there are some noteworthy limitations of society and feminism today. Specifically, some laws in the United States include: the restriction of reproductive health care and health care rights for transgender individuals, as well as certain laws targeting the education of the LGBTQ+ community in schools. Unfortunately, although feminist theory has advanced, the interwoven patriarchal and capitalistic systems in which we live in still impacts every aspect of our lives.

Similarly, feminism in general has a lot left to improve upon. In "A Day Without Feminism", Baumgardner and Richards outline how society continues to have a lot of limitations when it comes to its structure and practices (2015). Throughout their piece they describe how gender, sexual identity, race, and socioeconomic status continues to be rigid and paralyzing social constructions for folks deemed different in society (Baumgardner & Richards, 2015). When thinking about the future of feminism I am both pessimistic (similar to Baumgardner and Richard), and optimistic. From my perspective, I feel as though I have a commitment and social obligation to ensure feminism moves forward and progresses for the better.

Specifically, in my career choice of counselling I would like to advance feminist psychotherapy. Unfortunately, power inequities have not been investigated thoroughly in a counselling setting. From my perspective, a wide array of psychological and social problems may benefit from a feminist psychotherapeutic intervention. For example, feminist psychotherapy's philosophy seems to be very effective in a sexual assault center setting (Murdock, 2013). However, one limitation of feminist psychotherapy and teaching feminist theory in my case, is how does a male identifying person (like myself), help individuals through means of feminist therapy while also being male presenting? Unfortunately, this

issue in feminist therapy has not been thoroughly addressed. Overall, I hope society is able to advance feminism in the future years to come.

Readings

Reading 1


Declaration of Sentiments

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Reading 2

Red Intersectionality

Nathalie Clark

RED INTERSECTIONALITY AND VIOLENCE-INFORMED WITNESSING PRACTICES 

unheard voices of Indigenous women. Her voice echoes into me now. *We are not victims*. We are organizers. We are freedom fighters. We are feminists. We are healers. This is not anything new, for centuries it has been so” (1994: 11 emphasis in original). From the words of Sioux activist Zitkala-Sa (1901) over a century ago, through to the voices of my friends and sisters and the Indigenous feminist activists writing and speaking out today this knowledge of the interlocking arteries of colonialism has always been part of our truth-telling (de Finney 2010; Hunt 2014; Simpson 2011). Long before the writings of the early African American women activists who were part of the Combahee Collective in 1977 or Kimberle Crenshaw, the critical race scholar who coined the term intersectionality in 1989, early Indigenous activists such as Zitkala-Sa and Winnemucca (1883) were central to fighting the issues of violence on the land and on the body as they witnessed it at the turn of the century. Zitkala-Sa² was instrumental in collecting the testimonies of three Indigenous girls violated by the imposition of capitalism through oil and mining in the tribal lands. I would argue that prior to the legal precedent of Kimberle Crenshaw, Zitkala-Sa put together the legal argument of gender, race, and age in her essay “Regardless of Sex or Age” (1924) in which she describes how “greed for the girl’s lands and rich oil property actuated the grafters and made them like beasts surrounding their prey” (quoted in Nason 2010: 52). Zitkala-Sa and other Indigenous feminists remind us again and again in their writing that violence has always been gendered, aged, and linked to access to land.

The understanding of the concept of intersectionality, as Mohawk activist Jessica Danforth (2011) has identified, is not new to our communities. Indigenous communities prior to colonization had multiple categories of gender, holistic understandings and approaches to health, and many had strong matrilineal traditions and complex systems of governance, systems of treaty, and peacemaking processes (Hunt 2013). Patricia Monture-Angus puts it thus: “[T]o artificially separate my gender (or any other part of my being) from my race and culture forces me to deny the way I experience the world” (1995: 198). This is echoed by Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson who argues that “we have to understand people within the multiplicity of frames that shape their lives—everyday frames of experience that they choose, that they inherit, that are imposed on them and that may be transformed, disintegrated, forgotten or ritualized” (2003: 41).

Indigenous ontology is inherently intersectional and complex in its challenging of the notions of time, age, space, and relationship. Prior to colonization in many Indigenous communities, identity existed in a “space, time

and place continuum” (Jojola 2003: 95). This complexity, or holism inherent in Indigenous communities was and continues to be the focus of colonial violence through policies inflicted on the land and on the body; colonial processes were not only gendered, they also attacked the other intersectional ways of being within Indigenous communities, including the complimentary roles of women and also the sacredness of Two-Spirit Indigenous peoples (Driskill 2010) as well as the roles of children and youth within the community (Winnemucca 1883).

In order to address the root causes of violence against Indigenous girls and women, it is crucial to center the knowledge of Indigenous girls and affected Indigenous communities and to support Indigenous researchers and policy processes grounded in Indigenous epistemologies. This article challenges conventional intersectionality and trauma scholarship by foregrounding Indigenous girls’ resistance, Indigenous sovereignty/nationhood, and anti-colonialism. At the same time, discussions of colonialism must not grow so abstract that they overshadow individual Indigenous girls’ interpersonal experiences of violence and the particular forms of gendered colonialism operating within Canadian society and within Indigenous communities and our everyday practices of witnessing and receiving these disclosures. I therefore argue for an Indigenous Intersectionality framework, what I call Red³ Intersectionality—inherently activist, responsive to local and global colonization forces, and theorized for the emergent “multifarious, polyvocal” (Grande 2004: 2) indigenous identity with the clear goal of sovereignty. I draw here on the work of Grande’s “Red Pedagogy” (2004: 2) and Lester-Irabinna Rigney’s indigenist pedagogy “whose goals are to serve and inform Indigenous struggle for self-determination” (1999: 119). Rigney (1999), Grande (2004, 2008a), and Smith (1999) advocate for methodologies that are rooted in Indigenous sovereignty and grounded in Indigenous ontology and epistemologies and, most importantly, are committed to work that is anticolonial, activist, and focused on the goals of transformation, Indigenous sovereignty, and liberation.

In my own research and writing in this area with my friend and Indigenous activist and scholar Sarah Hunt (2011), I have joined the voices of other Indigenous scholars (de Finney 2010; Kenny 2006) in calling for a more complex understanding of policy and programming as it affects Indigenous girls. Carolyn Kenny describes the impact of what she calls the “double bind” (2006: 552) in the lives of Indigenous women and girls of being silenced in key decision and policies that have an impact on their lives while, at the same time, their participation is essential to social change, leadership, and healing in their communities.

Reading 4

All my Queer Relations Language, Culture, and Two-Spirit Identity

Chelsea Vowel

The imposition of colonial patriarchy has marginalized Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people through *Indian Act* governance systems, and by the *Indian Act* itself. As discussed in chapter 4, until 1985, when amendments were made to the *Indian Act*, an Indigenous woman or female-presenting Two-Spirit person who married a non-Indigenous man lost her legal status as an Indian, and was unable to pass on status to her children. In this way, generations of women and their children were denied their identities, and even their homes. The impact of the loss of legal identity is still being felt among Indigenous peoples through the struggle to reconnect with their families and communities.

Until very recently, Two-Spirit people were not recognized at all by Canadian law or society. In the eyes of Canadians, they do not exist; they are concealed by the gender-essentialized structures of colonialism, which have abolished their traditional places in

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Indigenous societies. So effective were Church- and government-led erasures of Two-Spirit people that reconstructing traditional Two-Spirit roles and ceremonies is often seen as peripheral to wider movements of resurgence. The work of groups like NYSHN reminds us that we must decolonize even our priorities as Indigenous peoples.

Structural erasures of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people have had a role in shaping their work as agents of resurgence. In a way, the overwhelming masculinization of *Indian Act* governance systems has ensured that Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people are less likely to be co-opted by colonial powers, and less invested in maintaining those colonial structures. Indigenous women have continued to exercise power through traditional (and often unpaid) ways, thereby maintaining traditional governance structures in many communities. Two-Spirit people have not necessarily experienced the same retention of traditional roles, however, and much work is needed to reconstruct and recentre our Two-Spirit relations within our communities. Acknowledging and honouring Two-Spirit people is vital to resisting resurgence based on gender essentialism that purports to “honour women” while simply recreating colonial patriarchal gender roles with a bit of Indian flair.

The deliberate exclusion of Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people from colonial structures of power has meant that, almost by default, the work of these people is highly politicized, as it must happen outside those colonial structures. This is not to say Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people have no access to colonial structures of power. In recent years, there has been more inclusion of women, though not necessarily of Two-Spirit people, in *Indian Act* governance systems. Yet, one has only to do a head count of male to female *Indian Act* chiefs to notice this recent inclusion shamefully mirrors the “inclusion” of women in Canadian politics, which is tokenism at best.

Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people experience all of the barriers faced by settler women and LGBT people, as well as the barriers experienced by Indigenous peoples in a state defined by settler colonialism. These barriers cannot be sifted out and separated from one another.

Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people must bear a heavy burden as they work to reestablish and revitalize Indigenous sociopolitical orders, exercise sovereignty, and live resurgence; indeed, it can be very dangerous and draining work. It should not be necessary to work so hard to overcome barriers imposed by people who were supposed to share these lands as guests and, eventually, as kin, not as rulers. Nonetheless, to exist as an Indigenous woman or Two-Spirit person is an inherently political act. Simply resisting erasure is part of the work.

Reading 5

From "In a Different Voice"

Carol Gilligan

Reading 6

Laura Brown on Feminist Therapy

Laura Brown

Laura Brown on Feminist Therapy

The project of feminist therapy is one of subversion as a strategy for effecting growth and healing for people in distress (L. S. Brown, 1994). Subversion is a concept that broadly represents the psychotherapeutic strategies by which therapist and client, working together collaboratively, use the tools of psychotherapy to undermine the internalized and external patriarchal realities that serve as a source of distress and as a brake on growth and personal power for all humans. In the feminist lens, psychotherapy is itself construed as a potential component of systems of oppression, with therapy as usual operating in the absence of an analysis of gender and power, practiced in ways that can actively or inadvertently uphold problematic status quos and reinforce hierarchies of value inherent in dominant cultures. Consequently, in feminist therapy, almost every taken-for-granted aspect of business-as-usual for a therapist, from where the office is located to how diagnosis is done to how therapist and client relate, is analyzed, questioned, and challenged with the tools of feminist theory, with the goal of making psychotherapy not only nonoppressive but actively liberatory.

Patriarchies are the near-universal hierarchical social systems in which attributes associated with maleness are privileged and those attributed to women are denigrated, no matter the sex of the individual in whom these qualities are found. Patriarchal systems are identified by feminist therapy and theory as the primary sources of human distress, including those kinds of distress that are organized into diagnostic categories and labeled psychopathology by the mental health disciplines. The actual distress or dysfunction about which an individual initiates therapy is thus not seen as pathological per se, no matter how much it impairs a person's functioning, but most likely a response to being immersed in toxic patriarchal realities. Such toxic social hierarchies of value are construed inherently inimical to personal power and healthy functioning for all people, even those apparently privileged by patriarchal norms of dominance and hierarchy. Feminist therapy, while viewing all psychotherapies as inherently political due to their participation in sustaining such oppressive norms (even via passive disengagement from an analysis of those norms), actively positions itself as having a political impact in the direction of social change.

Source: From Brown, L. S. (2010). *Feminist therapy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Pages 4–5.

Reading 7

The Yellow Wallpaper

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Reading 8

Core Tenets of Feminist Therapy

Wyche & Rice

1. Feminist therapy recognizes that being female always occurs in a cultural, social, political, economic, and historical context and affects development across the life span.
2. Feminist therapy focuses on the cultural, social, political, economic, and historical factors of women's lives as well as intrapsychic factors across the life span.
3. Feminist therapy includes an analysis of power and its relationship to the multiple ways women are oppressed; factors such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and ablebodiedness, singly or in combination, can be the basis for oppression.
4. Feminist therapy acknowledges that violence against women, overt and covert, is emotionally, physically, and spiritually damaging.
5. Feminist therapy acknowledges that misogyny exists in all women's lives and is emotionally, physically, and spiritually damaging.
6. Feminist therapy's primary focus is on strengths rather than deficits. Therefore, women's behaviors are seen as understandable efforts to respond adaptively to oppressive occurrences.
7. Feminist therapy is committed to social change that supports equality forever
8. Feminist therapy is based on the constant and explicit monitoring of the power balance between therapist and client and pays attention to the potential abuse and misuse of power within the therapeutic relationship.
9. Feminist therapy strives toward an egalitarian and nonauthoritarian relationship based on mutual respect.
10. Feminist therapy is a collaborative process in which the therapist and client establish the goals, direction, and pace of therapy.
11. Feminist therapy helps girls and women understand how they have incorporated societal beliefs and values. The therapist works collaboratively with them to challenge and transform those constructs that are destructive to the self and helps them create their own perspectives.
12. Feminist therapy empowers girls and women to recognize, claim, and embrace their individual and collective power as girls and women.
13. Feminist therapy expands girls' and women's alternatives, options, and choices across the life span.
14. Feminist therapy is a demystification process that validates and affirms the shared and diverse experiences of girls' and women's lives.
15. Feminist therapy involves appropriate types of self-disclosure. However, because self-disclosure may be harmful, it must be both value and theory driven and always in the client's best interest. Therapists must develop methods of continually monitoring their level of self-awareness.
16. Feminist therapists are committed to continually monitoring their own biases, distortions, and limitations, especially with respect to cultural, social, political, economic, and historical aspects of girls' and women's experiences.

From Wyche, K. F. & Rice, J. K. (1997). *Feminist Therapy* (p. 69). In J. Worell and G. Johnson (Eds.), *Shaping the Future of Feminist Psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Copyright © 1997 by the American Psychological Association

Reading 9

From “The Bitch Manifesto”

Jo Freeman

Reading 10

A Day Without Feminism

Jennifer Baumgardner & Amy Richards

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