THEORIZING AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO FEMINIST COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ii
ABSTRACT iv
INTRODUCTION 1
CHAPTER ONE: FEMINIST COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY 13
The Feminist Movement 13
Waves of Feminism 15
Problematizing the Wave Metaphor 16
First-Wave Feminism 18
Second-Wave Feminism 19
Third-Wave Feminism 20
Fourth-Wave Feminism 22
Feminist Pedagogy 24
Queering Feminist Pedagogy 30
CHAPTER TWO: QUEER IDENTITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION 33
Brief Overview of Queer Visibility in the United States 33
Advancements in Education Policy 37
Defining Queer Spaces 38
CHAPTER THREE: INTERSECTIONAL FEMININST PEDAGOGY AND CRITICAL LITERACY 41
Defining Critical Literacy 48
Freire and Feminism 49
The Future of Intersectional Feminist Pedagogy 51
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS 55
WORKS CITED 57

ABSTRACT

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In this thesis, I address the absence of intersectionality in feminist scholarship, particularly in the study of feminist composition pedagogy. As a discipline, Rhetoric and Composition concerns itself with shifts in social discourse and their material implications. I argue that educators in this field who employ feminist pedagogical practices have a responsibility to be attentive to activist discourse, and, as such, must begin including intersectional theory in their feminist research. Freire's discussions of classroom power relations and critical literacy coupled with hooks's attention to intersectional oppressions provide a foundation for future scholarly discussions of intersectional feminist pedagogical practices in composition classrooms. Using queer student identities as a target population, I argue that feminist composition pedagogues need to re-embrace the work of Paulo Freire and bell hooks in order to begin articulating feminist pedagogical practices that are intersectional in nature. Historically, both feminist scholarship and intersectional scholarship have tended to exclude queer populations; however, in light of increased visibility of LGBT+ persons in recent years, the ways in which intersectional concerns manifest themselves in this community are becoming more evident. As classrooms are made up of a diverse array of students and often stand in as microcosmic mirrors of society at large, it is crucial that educators

develop pedagogical methods that are mindful of intersecting modes of oppression within the queer community. I argue for a more inclusive feminist pedagogy that is mindful of intersectional concerns, as well as for further scholarly work exploring ways to make feminist pedagogy more intersectional.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of feminist pedagogy has, historically, been twofold: to allow educators to ethically bring their feminist activism and principles into the classroom and to foster an environment in which students can engage with the types of cultural questions that are often a part of feminist discourse. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, feminists working in academia sought to synthesize "activist feminism" with their academic work, resulting in what is now termed "academic feminism" (Briskin 60). These early feminists' efforts formed the foundation of interdisciplinary fields of study, most importantly Women's and Gender Studies, and these efforts served as a catalyst for the emergence of feminist pedagogy. Over time, feminist pedagogy has evolved into a multifaceted field with its own defined principles, methodologies, and practices, and many disciplines have articulated their own discipline-specific feminist pedagogical practices. As Tracy Penny Light and Laura Micciche both argue, it is more appropriate to discuss feminist pedagogy as a plural rather than singular concept: in current academic discourse, it is simply insufficient to assume that the multitude of feminist pedagogies can be condensed into a universal set of practices employed by all feminist pedagogues (Penny Light 2; Micciche 129-130).

Because contemporary discussions of feminist pedagogy are so inundated with contributions from a variety of disciplines, it is difficult to craft a working definition of the term. However, in order for scholars of feminist pedagogy to continue advancing the field for twenty-first century classrooms, it is important for us to articulate a working definition that acknowledges both the unifying principles and the variety of feminist

pedagogies. Penny Light's definition offers a description that positions feminist pedagogy as a philosophical approach to education that privileges epistemology, critical literacy, and socially just citizenship. She defines feminist pedagogy as a practice that

> critiques traditional received wisdom, recognizes the existing knowledge of students, challenges the hierarchy of ways of knowing, renegotiates and reforms the relationship between teacher and students, and respects and values the diversity of the personal experiences of all students while relating the learning in academic classrooms to the "real world." (4-5)

Rhetoric and Composition, one of the many disciplines to have formed their own specific feminist pedagogical practices, is primarily concerned with issues of agency, voice, and equality within the classroom space. Beginning in the early 1980s, composition scholars sought to bring advancements in feminist thought and pedagogy to the study of Rhetoric and Composition.

While contemporary feminist pedagogues have sought to craft curricula and a classroom presence that acknowledges and respects the multitude of identity categories that may be present within the classroom space, they are largely doing so based on the work of second- and third-wave feminists. In order to best meet the needs of twenty-first century students, those of us who consider ourselves feminist practitioners must be willing to incorporate the shifts occurring within the feminist movement into our pedagogical practices. Activist feminists, in recent years, have taken up questions of inclusivity, and they are raising important questions about the feminist movement's history of excluding identities that do not fit into a white, middle class, female paradigm. Of the many discussions taking place regarding this issue, activist feminists have

specifically focused their attention on intersectional modes of oppression. The concept of intersectionality is not new – in fact, prominent second-wave feminist bell hooks articulated and discussed in detail the ways in which oppressions intersect when an individual happens to belong to multiple marginalized communities more than three decades ago in her seminal work, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*.

For non-white feminists, the exclusion from mainstream feminism resulted in a substantial body of academic and activist work devoted to the specific concerns of women of color. For women of color, the idea that multiple forms of oppression cannot only coexist but actually intersect to create uniquely targeted oppressive circumstances was not a revelation – it was obvious. As bell hooks expresses in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, the mainstream feminist movement had excluded the experiences of anyone who was not a middle-class white woman from its inception (hook ix). As a black woman raised in poverty in rural Appalachia, hooks invites us to consider her own experiences as an example of intersectional concerns. It should be noted that hooks did not use the term "intersectional." *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center* was published in 1984, five years prior to the term's first use in academic writing. hooks argues that the forms of oppression she experienced as a black woman, as a poor woman, and as an Appalachian woman were all uniquely compounded because they did not exist irrespective of one another. Even though microaggressive actions (i.e., casual racism, harmful southern stereotypes, etc.) could and did occur because of individual aspects of her identity, she also experienced the doubly oppressive assumptions that come with being a black woman from the south. When she attended Stanford, for instance, she recalls feeling ostracized from classmates, and even professors, because both of these

components of her identity were visible and ultimately incited microaggressive assumptions about her character and intellect.

Academic feminists, including practitioners of feminist pedagogy, who study and understand oppression as a phenomenon occurring within the cross-section of multiple types of socially constructed identities are described as “intersectional,” a term coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989 (141). Intersectionality has become the preferred paradigm for fourth-wave feminists because “[t]he ‘intersection’ imagery relies on the notion that race and class and gender are separate entities that come together—intersect—at specific experiential and structural points” (139-140). Furthermore, the concept of intersectionality has been a significant part of legal scholarship and the work of black feminist scholars since the early 1980s. The first formal definition of the term originated in the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw Williams’ essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” and she explains the term in the following way: “[b]lack women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender” (142). She also makes note of the historically imbalanced workload in seeking to undo these patterns of exclusion. Exclusion, she explains, “cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure” (145). Experiencing multiple, intersecting forms of oppression is more than simply adding together the consequences of individual marginalization; rather, these intersection oppressions compound to create entirely new forms of oppression that target not only co-existing identity categories, but also in the

ways that these categories inform one another. Finally, she argues that any "analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address" intersectional concerns (139). Thus, for feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women, the entire framework . . . must be rethought and recast" (144).

As Crenshaw Williams notes, intersectionality refers to the ways in which marginalized identities overlap and the unique double-oppressions that occur as a result of these intersecting identities. In short, the feminist movement has, from its inception, failed to include discussions of race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, and many other demographic factors. Even as late as feminism's third wave, activist and academic feminists have excluded members of these marginalized communities from their work.

It is important to note that the "intersectional metaphor" is not universally agreed upon amongst feminists and critical race scholars. Like any critical concept, it has been subjected to its fair share of criticisms. In the article "Colorblind Intersectionality," Devon Carbado seeks "to radicalize and reinvigorate intersectionality by first moving the theory back to its initial articulation and then moving it forward to new sites and concerns" by outlining six standard criticisms of intersectional theory:

1) Intersectionality is only or largely about Black women, or only about race and gender.
2) Intersectionality is an identitarian framework.
3) Intersectionality is a static theory that does not capture the dynamic and contingent processes of identity formation.

4) Intersectionality is overly invested in subjects.
5) Intersectionality has traveled as far as it can go, or there is nothing more the theory can teach us.
6) Intersectionality should be replaced by or at least applied in conjunction with [fill in the blank]. (Carbado 820)

Although it is beyond the purview of this project to address and rebut each criticism of intersectionality, Carbado offers a concise statement about these criticisms that may be helpful in guiding those engaging in dialogue on the subject:

> Scholars have mobilized intersectionality to engage multiple axes of difference—class, sexual orientation, nation, citizenship, immigration status, disability, and religion (not just race and gender). And they have employed the theory to analyze a range of complex social processes—classism, homophobia, xenophobia, nativism, ageism, ableism, and Islamophobia (not just anti-Black racism and sexism). (812-813)

The final critique on Carbado's list suggests that intersectionality is incomplete or insufficient without being applied in conjunction with other theoretical perspectives, and is perhaps the most harmful in its capacity to prevent effective social progress. For heavily academized theories to become employable within mainstream discourses, nonacademic activists must be able to interact with and understand them. Intersectionality, as Ivy Ken argues, offers an easily understood metaphor for a complex array of multifaceted concerns; or, put simply, it offers a way for feminists outside of academia to engage with intersectional concerns and incorporate intersectionality into their activism.

Furthermore, the suggestion that intersectionality is an insufficient framework only undermines the crucial efforts of black feminists to disrupt the white, middle-class nature of mainstream feminism. Negating intersectionality's power reinforces the negation of power that has denied women of color access to mainstream feminist discourse in the first place. It is therefore absolutely crucial that a move toward intersectionality among feminist educators must be undertaken, and it must be done so with great care and attention to historical precedent. In short, it is *not* the responsibility of intersectional theory to support the entire weight of feminism's problematic history within its framework; instead, it is the responsibility of fourth-wave feminists to improve their feminism by making it intersectional.

Presently, activist feminists are striving to be more inclusive in their work. Intersectionality has become a sort of "buzz word" within activist circles, and though these efforts toward inclusivity are long overdue, contemporary feminists are working to acknowledge the feminist movement's problematic history of exclusion. Slogans such as "if your feminism isn't intersectional, it isn't feminism" are becoming an important part of mainstream activist discourse, and feminists' efforts to change the face of the current feminist movement are being credited with changing the face of modern feminism.[12] In America's increasingly hostile and polarizing political climate, these activists' work is crucial in unifying the wide variety of identity categories that fall under the umbrella of what are considered feminist concerns.

Martha Rampton emphasizes the important role of creativity and breaking tradition in fourth-wave feminism. She describes fourth-wave feminists as "not just reincarnations of their second wave grandmothers" and argues that they also "bring to

the discussion important perspectives taught by third wave feminism."[13] Fourth-wave feminists have adopted intersectionality into both their lexicon and activism, and they believe that "feminism is part of a larger consciousness of oppression along with racism, ageism, classism, ableism, and sexual orientation" (Rampton). With my project's focus on how intersectionality can specifically benefit queer students, it is important to note that fourth-wave feminists seek to shift the feminist movement into a set of sociopolitical beliefs that includes acceptance and inclusions of LGBT+ persons and individuals who consider themselves nonbinary (i.e., not conforming to a traditional male or female gender).

Baumgardner addresses the question plaguing contemporary feminist circles: is there a fourth wave of feminism, and in what ways is it different from its predecessors? While there has definitely been a shift in goals and thought significant enough to constitute a new phase of a long-evolving movement, Baumgardner suggests that the answer is actually quite simple: "Personally, I believe that the Fourth Wave exists because it says that it exists. I believe the Fourth Wave matters, because I remember how sure I was that my generation mattered" (Baumgardner). According to Rampton, "[p]art of the reason a fourth wave can emerge is because . . . millennials' articulation of themselves as "feminists" is their own: not a hand-me-down from grandma. The beauty of the fourth wave is that there is a place in it for all – together" (Rampton). Defining fourth-wave feminism is contentious, however, and many feminists contest these shifts, particularly the emphasis on including nontraditional gender identities and transgender persons. For the purposes of this research, one must assume that a fourth wave of feminism is emerging and that it is distinct from the preceding waves in its philosophies

and practices. For scholars of feminist pedagogy, the flexibility of the fourth wave presents an unprecedented exigence for re-examining and improving pedagogical models, beginning with bringing attention to intersectional feminist concerns affecting the classroom space.

In this thesis, I am seeking to explore the ways that fourth-wave feminists can bring this shift in activist goals into the academy. Academic feminism must work in tandem with activist feminism; otherwise, it will quickly become outdated and therefore ineffective. In the field of Rhetoric and Composition specifically, feminist pedagogues must pay attention to these shifts in discourse, and they must begin considering the role of intersectionality in shaping feminist discourse. As educators, Rhetoric and Composition scholars need to also consider the impact that this discourse will have on their teaching practices. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to undertake the entirety of fourth-wave feminist thought, I will discuss the impact of fourth-wave feminism's attention to intersectionality on improving and employing intersectional pedagogical practices within the composition classroom.

One of the most important sites for scholars of Rhetoric and Composition to effectively employ feminist pedagogy is in the first-year writing classroom. Educators in this field teach a variety of classes, of course, but first-year writing courses are undeniably one of the most crucial learning sites for those trained in composition studies. Nearly all American universities have some version of a composition course that is required of all students, and with the rise in popularity of degrees specifically in Rhetoric and Composition, it is increasingly common for scholars in this field to have specific training in these first-year writing courses. Therefore, it is of the utmost

importance for feminist pedagogues teaching first-year composition courses to employ pedagogical practices that are critical of the power dynamics that shape modern society, including the microcosmic society present within the confines of the classroom. In short, feminist pedagogues teaching composition classes have a responsibility to be intersectional both in their own classroom practices and to ensure that they create a classroom environment in which students can explore cultural phenomena with a critical lens that is mindful of intersectional modes of oppression.

Among the many identity categories that exist in first-year writing courses are those related to gender and sexuality. Especially with the political, legislative, and cultural attention that this group has experienced in recent years (consider, for example, the Supreme Court's ruling on marriage equality in 2015 or the influx of so-called "bathroom bills" responding to increased visibility of transgender persons), it is more important than ever to acknowledge, respect, and explore the specific needs of queer students in the composition classroom. As a discipline, Rhetoric and Composition is devoted to exploring, respecting, and challenging social discourse, as well as to studying social construction, power relations, and effective written and verbal communication.

While a portion of this thesis will include a discussion of fourth-wave feminism's impact on current pedagogical practices, I will be focusing more specifically on the ways that intersectional feminist pedagogy can benefit students with queer identities. The traditional "holy trinity" of race, class, and sex has been the primary subject of academic feminism in the last decade; however, feminist scholars have only recently begun to consider the wider spectrum of gender identity and sexuality as a part of feminist

discourse.[16] As a field, Queer Studies has gained prominence in its own right, and the queer scholars' contributions have allowed for the creation of foundational principles for studying queer identities. The current emphasis on intersectionality among activist feminists would benefit immensely from including these contributions as a part of their work. For academic feminists, engaging with the dialogue of Queer Studies scholars is crucial in crafting an intersectional feminist pedagogy that benefits queer students. In short, feminist pedagogues have a responsibility to employ intersectional feminist pedagogical practices, and this includes gaining a deeper understanding of the intersectional modes of oppression experienced by queer students.

An intersectional approach to feminist pedagogy helps to ensure that educators are not only cognizant of intersecting modes of oppression but that they are also prepared to employ strategies that are inclusive of these respective marginalized identities and the nuanced ways that they coalesce to create multimodal oppressions. Using the work of Paulo Freire and bell hooks, I will articulate the ways that critical literacy can be used to put intersectional feminist pedagogy into practice in the first-year composition classroom. Using the intersectional identities within queer student populations as my model for demonstrating the benefits of intersectional feminist pedagogy, I will provide a brief history of feminist pedagogy and queer identities in higher education, discuss the specific intersectional concerns that queer students face in the classroom space, and, finally, offer strategies for employing intersectional feminist pedagogy in first-year writing classrooms. Although the discussion in this thesis focuses primarily on intersectional issues in the queer community, I hope that future scholarship

will advance discussions of intersectionality with respect to other marginalized populations.

CHAPTER ONE: FEMINIST COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY

In order to address developments in feminist pedagogy, I must first discuss the historical contexts that surround the terms “feminist” and “feminism.” In this chapter, I will provide an overview of both feminist history and feminist pedagogy, addressing the ways in which activist feminism has influenced and shaped academic feminism.

The Feminist Movement

The *Oxford English Dictionary*, often considered among scholars of language and literature to be the premiere authority on English language and usage, offers the following definition of the term “feminism”: “Advocacy of equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and economic rights of the female sex; the movement associated with this” (“Feminism, n.” 2007).

However, the *OED*’s defining feature, its documented instances of usage and contexts, is woefully incomplete. Last updated in 2011 and based on its usage in an article from British news magazine *The Guardian*, the *OED*’s documentation contains only seven entries total, dated 1895, 1897, 1909, 1913, 1950, 1971, and 2011, respectively. While feminist scholars still engage in debate about the movement’s timeframe, they almost unanimously agree that the mid-twentieth century was a crucial time for the movement, with the academic study of feminism gaining significant traction during that time. The lack of attention to important fluctuations of the term’s meaning and usage indicates that the *OED*, like many other areas of traditionally male-dominated academic authority, fails to embrace a full, thorough understanding of feminism in the first place. Oversights of this nature are commonplace, especially in academic circles. For instance, one need only look at the number of higher educational institutions that

exclude studies of feminism (i.e., specific courses in Women's and Gender Studies or interdisciplinary courses in social sciences or humanities that address women-centered content) from their curricula. Even liberal arts institutions, which pride themselves on the diverse and interdisciplinary nature of their curricula, often fail to include such coursework in their general education requirements (Weigman 826). This exclusion forms the basis for the emergence of feminist pedagogy, a sub-movement of feminism that focuses specifically on educational concerns and experiences, especially teaching practices.

In order to understand the significance of dates and timeframes within the feminist movement, scholars must take into consideration the nuanced distinctions among the four waves of feminism and their respective goals and ideological positions. Early feminists (i.e., first- and second-wave) were largely concerned with political advocacy and achieving liberation for women in a number of arenas, including voting rights, equal pay, and reproductive autonomy (Micciche 130). While these fundamental goals, which all center around the idea that women are independent beings who deserve social and economic equality, have remained as the feminist movement has progressed, shifts in thought during the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s have influenced the movement and its goals. Third-wave feminism, which Laura Micciche dates from 1988-2010 – although these dates are not rigid – held these same fundamental goals in high esteem, but their approach began to move toward emphasizing the individual. First-wave and second-wave feminism tended to consider the collective "community of women," however, that "community," as bell hooks points out in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* often only included middle-class white women. Fourth-wave feminism,

which Micciche describes as “burgeoning” and beginning around 2010, attempts to emphasize and empower both individuals *and* communities, and it is distinct from third-wave feminism in the way it embraces intersectionality and uses technology for feminist activism (Micciche 132).

In spite of the wide-reaching acceptance of “waves” as the chronological markers of the movements’ evolutions, there are critics who question the metaphor’s efficacy primarily by arguing that this dominant metaphor fails to recognize the nuances of feminism’s shifts in thought over time. Some scholars, particularly feminist historians, contend that “The waves metaphor [used] to delineate feminist activism in the United States is troublesome [,] . . . eliding the experiences of women of color, men, young people, and others whose activist work falls under a capacious definition of feminism” (Evans and Chamberlain 400). They explain,

> Employing the first, second, and third waves to denote turning points in feminist activism over time was just the beginning; now historians are referring to tidal waves, cresting waves, and making waves. The ubiquitous waves metaphor remains the dominant conceptual framework for analyzing and explaining the genesis of movements for women's rights in the United States. (400-401).

Waves of Feminism

The chronology of feminist history is often described using a “wave metaphor” (i.e., “First-Wave” Feminism). In short, the metaphor is meant to suggest that feminist thought, much like literal ocean waves, occurs in an extended chronology where each distinct wave builds upon the energy of its predecessor. According to Evans and

Chamberlain, feminism is still described using a “wave metaphor” despite the fact that feminists have criticized the way that it “[sets] up false dichotomies between generations of feminists” (397). Although contentious, the “wave metaphor” is still considered to be the accepted framework within which to describe the feminist movement’s chronology.

Evans and Chamberlain address these critiques and offer a way to engage in feminist scholarship in light of them:

> Feminist scholars frequently question the wave narrative, fearing the way in which it constructs generational divides and suggests periods of inactivity, whilst others have found it a useful way of understanding the chronological and ideological development of feminism . . the coterminous existence of second, third and fourth wave [has] changed the nature of the wave narrative in such a way as to require a different critical approach, one that recognises the power of the discourse and the pragmatic implications of its use. (398)

For the purposes of this research, it is necessary to both problematize and utilize the wave metaphor because it still operates as the preferred academic paradigm; it is important to note, however, that many feminists joining the movement within the fourth wave acknowledge the problems with the metaphor, and seeking a shift in terminology may well become a goal for fourth-wave feminists.

Problematizing the Wave Metaphor

Evans and Chamberlain explain the wave metaphor’s origin, citing Marsha Lear as the first to use it, “The wave narrative . . . was intended to distinguish US, UK and European women’s liberation movements from the campaigns for women’s suffrage . . .

even a brief survey of the literature highlights that it is no longer used in a purely chronological or thematic fashion; indeed, the wave is a problematic device for many" (402). Furthermore, Evans and Chamberlain offer a concise list of concerns with the metaphor. According to them and the body of research they use, they argue that the wave metaphor complicates the feminist agenda in a number of ways. For example, it perpetuates marginalization within the movement by creating generational conflict excludes Black feminists and ignores concerns of feminists of color; and demonstrates a bias toward Western conceptions of feminism (397). Furthermore, the wave metaphor prevents critical examination of cross-wave issues as well as concerns that defy simple chronological categorization. Cross-wave concerns may also create identity conflicts for those that identify as feminists of a particular wave or do not identify with any wave. (402-403).

While these critiques each have legitimacy and deserve scholarly consideration, this project is more concerned with how fourth-wave feminists will respond to issues within the current wave paradigm. In spite of these criticisms, individual feminists often define themselves through the wave metaphor based on ideological or generational affiliation. Because scholars still "continue to provide academic evaluations of the themes, ideas and modes of activism within specific waves," Evans and Chamberlain suggest that "a more reflexive and fluid use of the term wave, that privileges continuity, inclusivity and multiplicity, becomes increasingly important" (396).

For the purposes of this project, the wave metaphor will be used, as Evans and Chamberlain suggest, in a "reflexive and fluid" manner. Consistency of terminology, even problematic terminology, ensures that scholars and activists are able to engage in

dialogue with one another. While a shift in terminology may become a prescient concern in future feminist research, current research is forced to utilize the wave metaphor in order to remain a part of the scholarly conversation.

First-Wave Feminism

First-Wave Feminism, as it tends to be understood in mainstream discourse, is the period of time where suffrage was the dominant feminist concern. Also referred to as the start of the Women's Rights movement, early feminism can best be described as overtly political, as its emphasis was on gaining political equality (i.e., voting rights) for women. The first wave was "a movement for civil and political rights, such as property ownership and suffrage" (Sutton 74-75). She also offers an estimated chronology, dating first-wave feminism from the Seneca Falls Convention to the passage of the Nineteenth Amdendment (131).

Composition Studies theorist Laura Micciche describes first-wave feminists as political in nature and being "coalesced around women's suffrage and the abolition of slavery" (132). Martha Rampton, director of Pacific University's Center for Gender Equity, explains, "[t]he goal of this wave was to open up opportunities for women, with a focus on suffrage." Most credit the beginning of first-wave feminism to advocates like Elizabeth Cady Stanton's work in organizing the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848." During the convention, three hundred men and women rallied to the cause of equality for women. . . .Stanton . . . drafted the Seneca Falls Declaration, outlining the new movement's ideology and political strategies (Rampton).

Often partnering with other social movements of the time, including abolition and temperance, first-wave feminism challenged the "cult of domesticity," and members of

the movement worked toward social and political progress for women, with a specific investment in voting rights.

Second-Wave Feminism

By the 1960s, feminism achieved a more mainstream status and began to experience an ideological shift that led to the emergence of a second wave of feminism. Martha Rampton differentiates the second wave from the first, writing, "[w]hereas the first wave of feminism was generally propelled by middle-class, Western, cisgender, white women, the second phase drew in women of color and developing nations, seeking sisterhood and solidarity" (Rampton). Furthermore, second-wave feminist sought to "demonstrate that race, class, and gender oppression are all related," thus forming the foundation for future discussions of intersectionality (Rampton).

Lasting until approximately the 1990s, second-wave feminism introduced sexual and reproductive health and autonomy as primary feminist concerns, and advocated for the Equal Rights Amendment became a top priority for the movement (Sutton 74). The second wave of feminism also emerged alongside a number of other socially progressive movements. The Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-War Movement were both taking place during this time, and the Feminist Movement struggled to compete for mainstream attention.

Compared to other social movements of the time, second-wave feminism "was easily marginalized and viewed as less pressing than, for example, Black Power or efforts to end the war in Vietnam. Feminists reacted by forming women-only organizations . . . and 'consciousness raising' groups" (Sutton 74-75). Second-wave feminists also "began to associate the subjugation of women with broader critiques of

patriarchy, capitalism, normative heterosexuality, and the woman's role as wife and mother."[39] One of the most crucial accomplishments to emerge from second-wave feminism is the differentiation of "sex and gender . . . the former being biological, and the latter a social construct that varies culture-to-culture and over time" (74-75).

Third-Wave Feminism

Third-wave feminism complicated the feminist movement by re-embracing thoughts and behaviors rejected by the movement's foremothers; for example, third-wave feminists readopted "the very lip-stick, high-heels, and cleavage proudly exposed by low cut necklines that the first two phases of the movement identified with male oppression" in order to subvert sexist culture and deprive it of verbal weapons (Rampton).

While third-wave feminists largely shifted the public image and personal aesthetical component of the feminist movement, their advancement of specific ideological principles and goals was also crucial in shaping the movement. The third wave "was informed by post-colonial and post-modern thinking . . . [and] many constructs were destabilized, including the notions of 'universal womanhood,' body, gender, sexuality and heteronormativity" (Sutton 75). Keeping with the "rhetoric of mimicry" that developed within the movement, third-wave feminists displayed an unprecedented level of irreverence toward the term "feminism" (Rampton). In fact, many third-wave feminists reject the feminist moniker altogether, as they find it "limiting and exclusionary." Third-wave feminists shun "simple answers or artificial categories of identity, gender, and sexuality. Its transversal politics means that differences such as those of ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, etc. are celebrated and recognized as

dynamic, situational, and provisional" (Rampton). Despite its dedication to challenging the boundaries of feminism, third-wave feminist thought often failed to fully embrace gender identities outside of the male/female dichotomy, transgender identities, and sexual orientations with the exception of women who identify as lesbians.

In addition to self-reflective critique, the feminist movement began receiving new levels of academic criticism during the third wave. While the advancement of academic feminism has been crucial in shaping sub-fields, including feminist pedagogy, it has not been without contention. The academization of feminism has resulted in a movement that has, Rampton contends, reinforced the idea of the academy as an "ivory tower" that allows feminist theory (and practice) to become insulated and therefore separate from activist feminist thought and practice. While academic feminists have advanced "[s]cholarship [in] women's studies, feminist studies, masculinity studies, and queer studies, those [fields] have generated theorists rather than activists (Rampton).

The "activist/academic" dichotomy forms the foundation for concerns that are being termed "fourth-wave interests." The subject of fourth-wave feminism is a source of great debate within both the academic field and the social movement: in fact, one could go as far as to label fourth-wave feminism as the attempt to synthesize theory and practice (i.e., theory and activism). With the relocation of most feminist outreach to higher education institutions and online platforms, the newest generation of feminists is invested in an "active" feminism, one that benefits all members of society and is both practical *and* theoretically grounded.

Fourth-Wave Feminism

Rampton contends that the disconnect between theory and practice (or, put another way, the difference between philosophical and practical feminism) is the foundation for the fourth-wave. She explains, "[t]he fourth wave of feminism is emerging because . . . young women and men realize that the third wave is either overly optimistic or hampered by blinders" (Rampton). Academic feminist thought is returning to "the realm of public discourse," and "issues that were central to the earliest phases of the women's movement are receiving national and international attention by mainstream press and politicians" (Rampton). The presence of feminism in public discourse helps bring attention to "problems like sexual abuse, rape, violence against women, unequal pay, slut-shaming, the pressure on women to conform to a single and unrealistic body-type and . . . female representation in politics and business." As a result of activist dialogue, feminism is no longer consideted "extreme," and feminists are rejecting academic monopolization of feminist principles, which often perpetuate intellectual elitism and ignores the value and contributions of activist feminism (Baumgardner).

Fourth-wave feminists, in short, advocate for a brand of feminism that has been "well honed in the academy, [and is] ready to support a new broad-based activism in the home, in the workplace, and in the streets" (Baumgardner). Also noteworthy is the inclusion of multiple generations within the fourth wave. As feminist advocate Jessica Valenti expressed in an interview with the *New York Times*, the coexistence of third- and fourth-wave feminists in the current era makes it increasingly difficult to identify as "third-wave" or "fourth-wave" based exclusively on one's generational affiliation" (Solomon). Positing the suggestion that fourth-wave feminism is an online phenomenon,

Valenti suggests that identifying with a particular wave is more indicative of philosophical belief rather than age; she states, “the terminology . . . never seems very accurate to me. I know people who are considered third-wave feminists who are 20 years older than me” (Solomon).

For educators who also consider themselves feminists, the four waves of feminism have each helped to shape a feminist approach to teaching. Beginning in the late second- and early third-wave, feminist pedagogy emerged as its own field of study and was readily adopted by numerous disciplines, including Composition Studies. Laura Micciche explains, “[f]eminist pedagogies in Composition Studies emerge from [a] wider context and orbit around the idea that pedagogy has the potential, even the responsibility, to interrogate and transform social relations” (128). Feminist pedagogues seek to “connect local, personal experiences to larger contexts of world-making, harkening back to the familiar second-wave feminist maxim, ‘The personal is political’” (Micciche 129). In Compostition Studies, feminist classroom practices must be informed by both academic and activist feminism in order to recognize the ways in which writing and literacy are part of larger social dialogues

While feminist pedagogy could not have developed in isolation from feminism as a social movement, it has become increasingly clear that academic feminism has divorced itself from practical feminism. For both feminist educators and fourth-wave feminists, synthesizing theory with practice is a crucial next step for the feminist movement (both in and out of the classroom). As Micciche argues, “[f]eminist pedagogy is a hopeful practice that envisions learning spaces as sites where more social justice relations can begin to take root” (145). Furthermore, feminist pedagogy is not “a discrete

set of practices but, much like the feminist movement generally, a flexible basis from which to launch intersectional pedagogical projects – projects focused on dialectic of multiple identity categories rather than, for instance, on gender or sex alone" (140).

The defining feature of fourth-wave feminism are its members' willingness to embrace intersectionality; therefore, practitioners of feminist pedagogy are currently facing a shifting paradigm in which their own work is more relevant to the movement than ever before. The move toward intersectionality is particularly crucial – while the term has already become commonplace in activist circles, it is still sorely lacking from academic discussions of feminist pedagogy.

Feminist Pedagogy

Practitioners of feminist pedagogy strive to address a broad range of educational concerns within the classroom space. According to Laura Micciche, "Feminist pedagogies, regardless of differences, share a common goal of actualizing social justice through teaching and learning methods" (140). In Composition Studies specifically, practitioners of feminist pedagogy are seeking to acknowledge and deconstruct traditional patriarchal power structures within the context of their students' experiences with literacy (i.e., reading and writing) and classroom dynamics. Micciche dates feminist composition pedagogy's emergence to the late 1980s, at least fifteen years behind other feminist pedagogical models. Early models of feminist composition pedagogy "tended to focus on experience as a legitimate form of knowledge, inherent gender differences and effects on writing, and alternative classroom assignments aimed at encouraging women students to write from positions of power" (129). This emphasis on personal experience formed the crux of early feminist composition pedagogy, and its

influence continues to be present in the field today in assignments involving narrative (i.e., personal narratives, literacy narratives, etc.).

In “Feminist Pedagogies,” Laura Micciche provides one of the most comprehensive overviews of the field to date. Beginning with early moves toward what would become feminist composition pedagogy, she traces the field’s development through the present. As her research demonstrates, most evolutions in feminist pedagogical models mirror shifts within the larger feminist movement. Most scholars (Annas, 1985; Reynolds, 2009; Micciche, 2014; Sutton, 2015) agree that Elizabeth Flynn’s 1988 article “Composing as Woman” was a defining moment for the field; as Micciche explains, “Flynn’s essay suggests a possible way forward for feminist researchers of pedagogy, helping to encourage a view of pedagogy as practice and object of scholarly inquiry” (136). Flynn’s groundbreaking essay propelled feminist pedagogy into the mainstream discourse surrounding composition pedagogies, and it began a legacy of feminist pedagogical thought that is still evolving today.

In “Composing as a Woman,” Elizabeth Flynn argues that instructors who provide affirmation of their female students’ experiences must function as the foundation for feminist-minded writing pedagogy. In this work, written during the transition from second- to third-wave feminism, Flynn offers a starting point for contemporary (i.e., fourth-wave) researchers by articulating the kinds of questions that they should address. She argues that feminist education within the field of Rhetoric and Compostion necessitates questions about the ways that gender differences and power relations are evident in written language. Third-wave (1988-2010) and fourth-wave (2010-present) theorists have expanded the parameters of feminist pedagogical research. For example,

in her 1993 book *Gender Influences,* Donnalee Rubin builds on Flynn's approach, which involved positioning feminist pedagogy in the context of social and psychological development.

Following the introduction of more empirical approaches, many theorists also began to shift toward classroom models that rejected competition in favor of collaboration. Karyn Hollis argues in her essay "Feminism in Writing Workshops: A New Pedagogy" for the idea of "woman friendly classrooms . . . [which] use non-competitive and student-centered activities" to facilitate large-group discussion among female students" (qtd. in Micciche 138). According to Laura Micciche, "pedagogical models began to reflect . . . postmodernist notions of agency, selfhood, subjectivity, and power" as these ideas began to gain traction with feminist theorist" (128). Put another way, third-wave (1988-2010) and fourth-wave (1988-2010) feminists started to distance themselves from simply reaffirming female students' experiences in the classroom and instead shifted their approach to include challenging dominant pedagogical practices that reinforced traditional, male-dominated agonistic conceptions of writing instruction. Feminist writing teachers began to reject the traditional persuasive essay found in most composition courses in favor of argumentative essay assignments that privileged mediation and compromise and that approached the acquisition of knowledge as a collaborative endeavor. Collaboration has since become a point of contention among third- and fourth-wave feminist scholars. Lunsford and Ede offered one of the more compelling arguments in favor of collaborative pedagogy by linking its value to feminist theory. Later scholars questioned the value of collaboration, including Evelyn Ashton-

Jones. She “questions collaborative pedagogies that purport to eliminate hierarchy and create more equitable classroom relations” (qtd. in Micciche 129).

Problematizing the idea of egalitarian classrooms may be described as an aim for fourth-wave feminist researchers who have recognized such an aim as unfeasible. bell hooks, for instance, believes that feminist teachers should view conflict in the classroom as “a catalyst for new thinking, for growth,” and she arrives at this knowledge based on her own experiences with racial inequality in academic environments (hooks 12). Micciche argues that feminist teachers “must confront rather than overcome” the reality of inequalities in the classroom, and for fourth-wave feminists, these inequalities are manifested in a number of ways, including race, class, and gender (128). Feminists, including those practicing feminist pedagogy, who study and understand oppression as a phenomenon occurring within the cross-section of multiple types of socially constructed identities are described as “intersectional.”

Intersectionality has become the preferred paradigm for fourth-wave feminists because “[t]he ‘intersection’ imagery relies on the notion that race and class and gender are separate entities that come together—intersect—at specific experiential and structural points” (Ken 3). Utilizing an intersectional feminist approach in the writing classroom means that practitioners are challenging the ways that these oppressions affect students’ writing practices, and such an approach inevitably fosters conflict and discomfort in the classroom. Incorporating intersectionality into feminist pedagogical provides an opportunity for fourth-wave feminists to confront, rather than perpetuate, these types of conflict.

In terms of feminist pedagogy, the differences in goals and emphases between third-wave and fourth-wave feminism are reflected in the pedagogical thought and classroom practices of the respective periods. Third-wave feminism's focus on individuality, for instance, is reflected in the way that compositionists and writing instructors of that period sought to employ feminist pedagogy in their classes. Pamela Annas explains that to teach writing in a "feminist" way means to encourage students, especially female students, to focus on finding their own voice and writing from a place of personal experience and understanding. Her approach is informed by the assumption that female students are often silenced in the classroom beginning in early years, and so these students learn to self-censor and write with the express purpose of pleasing authority figures and writing the "correct" way. Her goal is to help her female students shift their thinking by validating their personal experiences. By working with assignments like personal narrative, letter writing, and journaling, Annas is utilizing third-wave feminism's philosophical stance in her pedagogy: in short, by empowering the individual woman, we can work toward equality and empowerment for all women.

Annas's approach is reflected in the work of later third-wave feminist practitioners as well. Jacqueline Rhodes, for instance, writes about her use of "manifestos" in the composition classroom. These manifesto assignments take the concept of the traditional personal narrative and politicize it, thus giving students an opportunity to speak authentically and personally on a subject that they feel strongly about. Similarly, Nedra Reynolds discusses interruption as a feminist classroom practice. By encouraging female students to reject the censorship that silences them in the classroom and embrace the power of interruption, Reynolds believes that they can un-

learn the expectation of silence and docility. Furthermore, each of these practitioners utilizes a teaching approach that is considered standard for feminist writing teachers: they shift their focus from argumentation to mediation. Traditional argumentation, as it is taught in rhetoric and composition courses, tends to focus on more agonistic models of argument: that is, students choose one side of an issue and argue it fiercely, replete with evidence and logic. The feminist approach to argumentation is more nuanced, as well as more community-conscious. Rather than having students engage with traditional, combative styles of argument, assignments of this kind designed with a feminist perspective tend to focus more on identifying problems and proposing solutions or engaging in mediation rather than confrontation.

Wendy Hinshaw also embraces the individuality of third-wave feminism, but her approach differs slightly from the aforementioned practitioners. In her piece "A Feminist Pedagogy of Listening," she specifically discusses the role of the instructor in fostering a classroom space that will allow students to grow on their own terms. While teaching a women's studies writing course, Hinshaw found that her students felt more comfortable critically engaging with the course material when she became more of a listener than a speaker in the classroom. She does not remove herself from the class conversation altogether, nor does she allow student opinion to run rampant; what she does do, however, is engage in rhetorical listening strategies and model those for her students. She explains that rhetorical listening is an inherently feminist approach because it necessitates allowing individuals the space to speak and be heard, hence breaking the expectation of silence imposed upon female students.

Queering Feminist Pedagogy

Fourth-wave feminists' attention to intersectionality is bringing forth much-needed conversations about race and mainstream feminism's historical exclusion of women of color; however, it is equally important for contemporary feminists to address intersectional concerns within the queer community. Especially with the increased visibility of varied sexual orientations, trans persons, and individuals with nonbinary gender identities, fourth-wave feminists (both activist and academic) have a responsibility to acknowledge and advocate for those in the queer community. Furthermore, it is important to note that the queer community is not exempt from intersectional oppressions – within the community are a variety of races, genders, and (dis)abilities, and the feminist movement's dedication to equality and intersectionality must embrace the queer community as well as other demographic identities if it is to be truly intersectional.

As with other historical patterns of exclusion, mainstream feminists have a history of excluding queer people and their concerns from the feminist movement. Throughout the second- and third-wave feminist movements, conversations surrounding sex, gender, and gender roles fluctuated greatly. As Kristan Poirot explains, conflicts over sexuality dominated second-wave feminist dialogue. For second-wave feminists, sex, both as a verb and noun, was contentious, with feminists embracing and rejecting sexual autonomy in equal measure.[65] Those feminists who rejected sexuality also specifically rejected homosexual, as well as heterosexual, relationships and sex acts; as Poirot explains, "conflicts over sexuality for many women – about what they wanted from sex, about what they had learned about themselves (and men) by learning about

sex, about what counted as ‘real’ sex – lay the groundwork for what would become their feminism” (72). This tension regarding biological sex and consequent gender roles also often included a rejection of nonbinary gender identities. For these feminists, gender was determined by biological sex, and gender relations fell solely within a male/female dichotomy. In their attempt to liberate women from the potential for male domination, this group of feminists inadvertently constrained women by limiting gender to a binary system prescribed by larger patriarchal institutions (73).

Third-wave feminists, alternatively, tended to aggressively promote female empowerment and openly celebrated sexuality, often at the expense of queer persons who do not fit within a traditional male/female paradigm, Furthermore, third-wave feminists tended to praise and embrace lesbian identities while simultaneously excluding other non-heterosexual orientations and transgender persons. Regarding transgender individuals, radical third-wave feminists often perpetuated the belief that because trans women were not “real” (read: biological) women, they did not experience oppressions in the way that biological women did, and therefore they should not be included in a movement designed to empower women.

The burgeoning fourth wave of feminism offers an opportunity for activist feminists to challenge their predecessors’ rejection of queer communities. With fourth-wave feminists’ attention to intersectionality, they have the opportunity to reshape the historically tense relationship between mainstream feminism and queer activists. With regard to educational settings, fourth-wave feminist pedagogues are uniquely situated to promote queer-conscious intersectionality through their pedagogical practices. Fourth-wavers have the opportunity to blur the lines between activist and academic

feminism, and doing so would benefit educators immensely by helping to ensure that they are employing the best feminist practices in the classroom.

In the context of higher education, feminist educators have the responsibility of ensuring that their classrooms are a space of equality and inclusivity. The intersectional approach to feminist pedagogy being proposed herein is intentionally conscientious of queer identities, and I am proposing that fourth-wave feminist pedagogues need to work toward more effectively queering their pedagogy. Although theories of intersectionality are rooted in discussions of race, transposing these theories onto discussions of queer identities is the next logical step in achieving a brand of feminism that is truly intersectional.

CHAPTER TWO: QUEER IDENTITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

With a working knowledge of feminist composition pedagogy established, I will turn my attention to queer student identities in higher education. Queer identities are, by definition, nonhomogeneous; however, it is also important to note that queer identities can, and often do, intersect with other marginalized identities, including race, class, (dis)ability, and more. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be using queer-identifying students as a sample population to demonstrate the importance of intersectional feminist pedagogy in reaching marginalized student populations. In this chapter, I will offer a brief overview of queer history with regard to education, followed by a discussion of intersectional oppressions in the queer community. Finally, I will argue that queer identities, and the intersectional concerns within the queer community, are inherently a feminist concern and should be considered within the purview of intersectional feminist pedagogical research.

Brief Overview of Queer Visibility in the United States

In a 2014 study of queer visibility on college campuses, Jessica Clawson found that "[h]igher education history has almost entirely omitted queer experiences, and queer history has not looked deeply into higher education" (Clawson 210). Importantly, she notes that queer research, particularly historical queer research, can be especially difficult because "queer spaces cannot [always] be observed. This concept of space and of relationships to it is important, as students' decisions to be out changes their relationship with themselves, their negotiation of spaces—including university campuses—and their feelings of belonging to their school community" (211). The available body of work on queer identities in educational spaces, particularly spaces

within higher education, is growing; however, at present, it is rather limited. My focus in this section will be to offer a discussion of queer identities in higher education that is as thorough as possible given the constrains of this project, and to explore the potential for first-year composition classrooms to become "queer spaces" with the implementation of queer-conscious intersectional feminist pedagogy.

Prior to the American Psychiatric Association's decision to depathologize homosexuality in 1973, queer public visibility was largely limited for fear of persecution and legal ramifications. Several other landmark events, including the Stonewall Riots of 1969 and the Supreme Court's ruling on anti-sodomy laws in 2003 (see: *Lawrence v. Texas*), led to increased visibility of queer persons in mainstream society. The Stonewall Riots were particularly important in increasing the visibilities of multiple queer identities, including gay, lesbian, transgender, and gender nonconforming identities (the last of which occurred largely through the public activism of drag queens like Marsha P. Johnson). Following Stonewall, "coming out was redefined by many people to be political. It came to mean shedding internalized homophobia and improving one's life" (Clawson 212). Furthermore, the "post- Stonewall era [saw] the emergence of a strong lesbian liberation movement, which would be crucial to keeping the queer rights movement from becoming entirely male-dominated (212). Although many scholars and queer persons regard Stonewall as a "big-city phenomenon," its effects rippled throughout queer communities and allowed even small-town queer persons to openly express their identities in public spaces" (213).

In order to understand the impact of the Stonewall Riots on queer visibility, researchers and educators must acknowledge and familiarize themselves with the

events that led up to the riots. On June 28, 1969, “the New York police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in . . . New York City” and “rounded up patrons for not carrying identification, for dancing, and for not wearing ‘gender appropriate clothing” (214). Following the raid, patrons of the Stonewall Inn came together, first as rioters, and then as peaceful protesters utilizing civil disobedience. This uprising, often called the beginning of the modern gay rights movement, led to the formation of gay and lesbian political activist groups, and these activist organizations brought the fight for gay rights into the mainstream dialogue surrounding civil rights. In addition to advocating for the right to be publicly visible, these groups advocated for legislative changes to protect LGBT+ individuals; as a result, the educational community began to experience shifts in how it responds to the needs of LGBT+ individuals.

In 1995, when third-wave feminism was reaching the height of its presence in mainstream society, LGBT+ individuals were still facing numerous legal and social barriers. While laws and policies in the United States varied greatly, homosexual persons were still coping with the societal impact of a history of criminalization and widespread homophobia. For example, prior to 1969, “every state in the union had a sodomy law prohibiting oral and anal sex between homosexuals and, in most states, between heterosexuals” (Sears xxi). Furthermore, “[a]s of 1993, there were still 20 states in which one could be imprisoned for same-sex sexual relations, described ‘sodomy,’ ‘unnatural intercourse,’ ‘deviant sexual conduct,’ ‘sexual misconduct,’ ‘and ‘crimes against nature’” (xxi). In fact, it was not until the passage of *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003 that sodomy was formally decriminalized; even following this landmark case, many states were slow to change their laws regarding same-sex sexual relations” (xxi).

As of 2016, the legal status of same-sex relations has improved drastically. The passage of *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015 ensured marriage equality for same-sex couples, and many states have adopted policies ensuring the rights of same-sex parents with regard to legal parenthood and adoption. These progressive changes have permeated even the most conservative institutions; for instance, the U.S. armed forces were one of the first government organizations to recognize healthcare and marital rights for same-sex couples in 2015. However, the sociopolitical backlash against these progresses demonstrates that homophobia and LGBT+ discrimination still dominates a great deal of the social discourse surrounding sexual orientation and alternative gender identities.

Similarly, higher education has faced its own series of changes and challenges with regard to legal rights for LGBT+ students and teachers. When viewed as a microcosmic reflection of American society, it is easy to see the ways that higher education has evolved in its treatment of LGBT+ students and teachers. However, advancements in protections for this population have not always been met with support, and academic institutions have faced unique challenges in their mission to be inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity. Often, education-specific progressive policies are met with counterarguments that challenge the validity of LGBT+ advocacy in educational spaces, and dissenters often question the appropriateness of discussing LGBT+ issues in education. As a result, educators have taken it upon themselves to ensure that their classrooms are meeting the needs of LGBT+ students in spite of the regressive policies that still exist in many schools (both k-12 schools and colleges and universities). Continued advocacy, both by and on behalf of LGBT+ students and

teachers, has helped to ensure that progress toward equality and anti-discrimination continues to grow, but education advocates often find themselves “fighting an uphill battle” with their efforts.

Advancements in Education Policy

Historically, educators have been at the forefront of the fight for equal treatment of LGBT+ persons in educational settings, and educational organizations have largely been supportive of these efforts. In 1974, the National Education Association (NEA) “amended their nondiscrimination statement to include protection for sexual orientation.”[79] This statement “was designed to prevent discrimination against gay and lesbian teachers,” and the NEA has continued its efforts by providing funding for gay and lesbian teacher litigation for its union members” (Rabinowitz 80). Throughout the next several decades, the conflict between homophobic political policies and progressive educational institutions intensified. From teachers facing employment discrimination and legal battles to secure their rights, to the discrimination, and, often, expulsion, of LGBT+ students, educational environments were often in flux with regard to their ability to protect these populations. In 1993, the Massachusetts Board of Education “unanimously adopted the nation’s first state educational policy prohibiting discrimination against gay and lesbian . . . students and teachers” (83). While this policy change was a mark of progressive action, the battle for the rights of LGBT+ teachers and students continued to be a contentious one. Although many significant changes in legislation and education policy (for instance, the establishment of the Harvey Milk School for gay and lesbian students in 1985), have continued to advance

LGBT+ rights in education, many of these discriminatory practices continue even today" (85).

Among the significant advancements made in the education community, the establishment of a scholarly journal devoted specifically to LGBT+ issues in education is perhaps one of the most important. In 2003, the *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education* published its first issue; in the decade following, this journal has continued to be a crucial resource of LGBT+ educators and scholars. As James T. Sears writes, "[t]he *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education* has sought to bridge [divides] as well as show commitment to multicultural and international coverage" of LGBT+ educational concerns (4-5). The purpose of the journal, Sears explains, is to offer an academic space committed to "disseminating ideas to an intellectually minded community while drawing implications to educational policies and practice" (5). In its inaugural volume, the journal included "an array of articles, essays, and special features" covering LGBT+ educational issues such as gay-straight alliance groups in schools, the specialized needs of transgender students, and funding allocation for LGBT+ support programs in both public secondary schools and higher education" (5-6).

Defining Queer Spaces

One of the most prominent activist goals in education circles is to establish "queer spaces" within educational institutions (Clawson 216). In higher education specifically, educators, both historically and presently, advocate for the classroom space to serve as a "queer space," which has resulted in heated disagreements between educators and outside citizens alike. The term "queer space," much like "feminist pedagogy" is difficult to condense into one singular definition; however, for the

purposes of this project, I will borrow definitions from Amy Stone. She describes queer spaces as "those spaces intentionally created and occupied by queer individuals [that] are valorized for their fluidity, flexibility, and liberatory potential" (1648). Stone elaborates:

> [Queer spaces] involve the construction of a parallel world, one filled with possibility and pleasure, while functioning simultaneously as an intervention in the world of the dominant culture . . . In its space of opportunity we are free to construct ourselves in flexible, unspecified and unpredictable ways. (1649)

The physical spaces that constitute "queer spaces" vary widely, and may include anywhere from bars, nightclubs, restaurants, hotels, and, especially in recent years, annual Pride celebrations.[88]

For many LGBT+ (and allied) educators, making the classroom into a queer space can be described as the ultimate goal of their activism. While acknowledging that changing adminstrators' attitudes and institutional policies is necessary for this goal to be fully actualized, the classroom space is often the one educational arena in which educators have the most autonomy. Especially in higher education, the freedom to lead one's classroom according to one's own principles and beliefs is one of the most powerful tools available to college educators. It is worth noting that educators working in public secondary schools often do not have nearly as much freedom, as they have more stringent administrative guidelines; however, the focus of this project is on educational practices in higher education, and discussing queer spaces in public secondary schools is beyond the purview outlined here.

While the relationship between feminism, both activist and academic, and queer identities is historically fraught, fourth-wave feminists are striving to be inclusive of marginalized persons as part of their feminist practices.[89] Similarly, academic feminists need to pay attention to the important role that queer identities play in conversations about intersectionality. Put simply, queerness is fundamentally a feminist concern because queer persons share many of the same motivations and intersectional oppressions that define fourth-wave feminist activism. Furthermore, the feminist movement has had far more success in garnering mainstream attention than the gay rights movement, and many fourth-wave feminists believe that it is their responsibility to shift the historically exclusive feminist paradigm to one that is concerned not only with race, binary genders, and class, but also with issues present in the queer community (Stone 1650).

CHAPTER THREE: INTERSECTIONAL FEMININST PEDAGOGY AND CRITICAL LITERACY

In the composition classroom, understanding gender's impact on student learning is contingent upon understanding the power afforded to students versus the power imposed upon them, and, in turn, how this power relation affects educational opportunities. Feminist pedagogues seek to not only use their own feminist principles to create classroom environments that are welcoming of all identity categories but also to utilize teaching methods that foster critical thinking and inquiry.

One goal of feminist pedagogy is to address the ways that gender affects students' learning. In order to understand this complex relationship, one must first understand the power dynamics at play in the two overlapping socially constructed identities: how is "gender," as a socially constructed identity, related to "student," as a socially constructed identity, and how do the various power relationships associated with these categorizations affect one another? Foucault provides an answer to this question in *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1*. He argues for an understanding of power that is relational, nonhierarchical, and inherently connected to discourse.

For contemporary feminist practitioners, the discourse surrounding gender is crucial in shaping the way that we understand gender's impact on students' learning; as the fourth wave of feminism continues to grow and develop, the discourse within that community regarding gender has shifted radically from previous feminist thought. Most contemporary feminists now understand gender as being inextricably linked to other aspects of identity (i.e., being intersectional) and they understand gender as being fluid rather than binary. For Foucault, this new understanding constitutes a form of resistance. As the discourse changes, the power within the relationship between those

who understand gender as being related only to sex and those who believe gender to be a construct separate from biological sex begins to shift. As the discourse becomes saturated with the newer understanding of gender as socially constructed, that knowledge begins to spread, and feminist educators are more empowered to address the consequences of gender's construction openly.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire articulates the problematic power dynamic between students and teachers in traditional models of education. He describes the "banking model," which sees students as empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge, and teachers as depositors of knowledge. This dynamic, according to Freire, results in dehumanization because it strips any power from the students and places the teacher in an all-powerful position. One related aspect of this student-teacher dichotomy that Freire does not consider is how gender factors in to the relationship. Most contemporary practitioners, including Laura Micciche and Jonathan Alexander, would contend that gender adds another dimension to this relationship because gender affects individual students' socialization and educational experiences. For instance, if, in a traditional model of education, the teacher is all-powerful, then it stands to reason that students are powerless; however, if there is an inherent imbalance of power between male and female students, then the distribution of power within the classroom becomes even more skewed.

As bell hooks explains, the most significant consequence of this gendered imbalance of power is the impact it has on educational opportunities. hooks clearly demonstrates ways that class, race, and gender have all worked together to hinder educational opportunities in her own life. From growing up on the "wrong side of the

tracks" in a black community in Kentucky during segregation to the unwelcoming environment she found when she first went to an elite university, hooks chronicles numerous instances where these components of her identity worked against her. This type of oppression is what feminist practitioners seek to address, challenge, and dismantle in their work. For feminist composition instructors specifically, that comes with a combination of knowledge and practice: first, instructors must have an awareness of the gendered concerns that affect student learning in order to understand what kinds of feminist issues exist within the classroom space; and, second, they must seek to address them within the parameters of their discipline's best practices.

Freire's and hooks's concepts provide a foundational understanding of what kinds of feminist issues exist within the classroom space. Jonathan Alexander provides concrete examples of feminist classroom concerns in his book *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy* including: misuse of gendered pronouns, heteronormative assumptions, racial misidentification, and curricula lacking diverse representation. However, I contend that embracing an intersectional approach to feminist pedagogy means that any issue relating to an imbalance of power that has a gendered component could readily be termed a "feminist concern."

The question facing contemporary feminist practitioners is not necessarily, "so, what are feminist concerns in the classroom?" Rather, it is, "these issues have been identified, so what can we do about them?" While successfully addressing, challenging, and deconstructing the problematic ways that gender can affect student learning certainly begins with an instructor's own theoretical awareness of concepts like intersectionality, power disparity, and the value of critical literacy, crafting methods of

practical classroom application can still prove difficult. To paraphrase Jonathan Alexander, the difficulty is not in knowing the problem exists but rather how best to combat it in a classroom (Alexander 7).

Micro-level changes in pedagogy are a great starting point, as practicing feminist pedagogy does require instructors to familiarize themselves with common classroom concerns. For example, instructors can personally assume the responsibility of modeling awareness in their own behaviors to signal expected behavior in the classroom space. Such behaviors might include requesting a student's personal pronouns when taking roll for the first time, asking a student to help pronounce a name not idiomatic to the instructor's native language, and avoiding divisive "male versus female" group activities (i.e., team challenges or competitive activities in which groups are divided based on gender identification).

As argued previously, feminist pedagogy needs to be much more than small behavioral changes in the classroom. Practitioners of traditional feminist pedagogy strive to identify, study, and understand the cultural consequences of gender inequality within the classroom space. Sociopolitical circumstances in the United States have created an opportune time for fourth-wave feminists to expand these goals by embracing intersectionality and advancing the study and practice of intersectional feminist composition pedagogy. In order to take advantage of this exigency, scholarly dialogue on defining and implementing intersectional feminist composition pedagogy is crucial. As feminists, as educators, and as scholars working during the shift from third- to fourth-wave feminism, we have a responsibility to be innovative leaders and advance intersectional theory as a fundamental component of feminist pedagogy.

As discussed in prior sections, current scholars of feminist composition pedagogy are principally concerned with issues of agency, voice, personal narrative, and the relationship between patriarchal systems of power and female students. Largely absent from the current literature, however, are nuanced discussions of critical literacy in relation to feminist pedagogy. While many scholars have alluded to pedagogical concepts related to critical literacy, there is a lacuna in the research on what might constitute a feminist approach to critical literacy. Paulo Freire, often considered the father of critical literacy, has had a strong influence on traditional feminist pedagogy. Subsequent changes in feminist thought have shifted attention away from critical literacy and personal agency (i.e., second-wave concerns) and more toward third-wave feminists' attention to conflict-oriented pedagogy. I argue that fourth-wave feminists must re-embrace Freire's work in order to successfully articulate and practice intersectional feminist pedagogy.

Freire's attention to the oppressed/liberated dichotomy is crucial for feminist practitioners because it offers a conception of this relationship that is nonhierarchical – that is, educators are not "liberators," but rather facilitators who allow students to liberate themselves from oppression. The way in which he defines "oppression" may also be beneficial in furthering educators' understanding of oppression, whether it is singular, multiplicitous, and/or intersectional. He connects oppression, as a social/political phenomenon, to the act of dehumanization. Put simply, dehumanization "marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it . . . [it] is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human" (44). Accoring to Freire, the struggle for humanization "is possible only

because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed" (44). For Freire, education is not the act of one person (the teacher/authority figure) providing knowledge to another person (the student). In fact, he articulates a distinctly different educational paradigm in which he addresses both the purpose of education and the role of teaching. Concerning the purpose of education, he writes, "education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom" (34). Freedom, in this sense, refers to the ways in which "men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (34). For Freire, the idea of liberation as the product of education means that taking charge of one's own learning will afford students the power to function autonomously within and critically consider larger societal concerns.

Regarding teaching, Freire argues that the practice of educating should be more concerned with knowledge creation than transference. He relates traditional methods of knowledge transference to rote, "machinelike memorization, and he contends that "critical study correlates with teaching that is equally critical, which necessarily demands a critical way of . . . thinking" (68). Feminist practitioners can benefit from Freire's descriptions of dehumanization and knowledge creation because they provide a framework within which to conceptualize intersectionality and the ways in which intersectional forms of oppression may contribute to dehumanization in unexamined, nuanced ways. By recognizing acts of dehumanization that can occur in the classroom

as a result of intersectional forms of oppression, educators can tailor their teaching methods to prevent such acts of violence. In short, feminist educators can create an opportunity for a collaborative learning environment that is cognizant of and respectful of all intersecting identities that coexist within the classroom space.

Based on my research, I suggest that revisiting Freire's work on critical literacy is vital in moving toward an intersectional feminist pedagogy. In short, current and future practitioners have not only to acknowledge and understand the intersectional forms of oppression that students experience, but they must also utilize critical literacy to help students come to terms with their own identities and provide students a safe space within which to explore the implications of these demographic identifiers for their literacy. By embracing the pedagogical models afforded by research on critical literacy, educators can participate in the "liberation" of students. It is important to note that teachers, in Freire's approach, are indeed participants in, rather than facilitators of, liberation. As Freire states, "Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people--they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress" (127).

Dialogue, for Freire, is the vehicle for change when it comes to liberation. He writes, "If the structure does not permit dialogue the structure must be changed" (98) Freire's argument suggests that it is impossible for someone to educate a population if they are not engaging in dialogue with that group. For practitioners of feminist pedagogy, engaging in dialogue with students regarding individual needs was once a common practice. However, third-wave feminist educators shifted away from the dialogic component of feminist pedagogy in favor of so-called "Bitch Pedagogy," which

embraces sophistic rhetoric and the use of conflict as a means of negotiation. Theorists and practitioners subscribing to this model of feminist pedagogy insist on “teacher authority” and reject student autonomy in the educational experience.[98] As a result, feminist pedagogy became more concerned with dictating feminist principles in the classroom than employing feminist practices.

Defining Critical Literacy

Heather Coffey defines critical literacy as “the ability to read texts in an active, reflective manner in order to better understand power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships” (Coffey). She argues that the development of critical literacy skills enables people to interpret messages in the modern world through a critical lens and challenge the power relations within those messages” (Coffey). This critical lens borrows from Freirean ideas, primarily in its attention to teachers as classroom facilitators. Pedagogues who promote critically literacy in the classroom invite students “to interrogate societal issues and institutions like family, poverty, education, equity, and equality in order to critique the structures that serve as norms as well as to demonstrate how these norms are not experienced by all members of society” (Coffey).

Arguably, Coffey’s definition is largely a condensed, modernized version of Freire’s work. Freire explains, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other (Freire 72). Coffey elaborates by rejecting the banking model in favor of “experiences that offer students opportunities to actively construct knowledge.” In practice, educational models based on critical literacy allow “schools [to] become spaces where students interrogate social conditions through

dialogue about issues significant to their lives" (Coffey). Teachers engaging in critical literacy also have certain responsibilities as facilitators, most importantly in enabling conversations that question traditional power relations (Coffey).

In opposition to the banking model, teachers who recognize the possible value of developing critical literacy do not view their students as vessels to be filled, and instead create experiences that offer students opportunities to actively construct knowledge. In this model, schools become spaces where students interrogate social conditions through dialogue about issues significant to their lives. Teachers engaged in critical literacy serve less as instructors and more as facilitators of conversations that question traditional power relations (Coffey).

Critical literacy, in short, is the ideal product of critical pedagogy; educators who are critical of the power structures that affect their students' ability to learn are better equipped to work alongside those students to critically examine said power structures. Practitioners of critical pedagogy embrace the discomfort associated with challenging socially constructed power relations. As bell hooks explains, conflict of this type in a classroom setting can, and should, function as a "catalyst for new thinking, for growth" (hooks 62). Likewise, practitioners of feminist pedagogy must be willing to embrace critical pedagogy and the discomfort that inevitably accompanies it, especially in order to develop future pedagogical methods that are more conscious of intersectional concerns.

Freire and Feminism

Freire's conception of nonhierarchical models of education is inherently feminist in nature. His discussion of dialogue and its role in liberation mirrors early feminist

pedagogical approaches (although early feminist educators were specifically concerned with the intellectual liberation of female students). He writes, “the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it” (39). This radicalism allows individuals to listen to, rather than confront, newfound revelations that result from critical inquiry. Using dialogue as a vehicle for understanding, individuals engaged in critical literacy do not see themselves as the “proprietor[s] of history or of all people, or the liberator[s] of the oppressed; [they do] commit [themselves], within history, to fight at their side” (39). The ultimately goal of education, within this framework, is not to recreate social hierarchy based on knowledge acquisition; rather, it is to foster and engage in dialogue that promotes continuous inquiry and knowledge creation with other members of society.

Critical literacy allows students to interrogate the world that they live in and the personal experiences that they have had as a result of their position of power in that world. The ability to question, or critically consider, one’s experiences allows for the creation, and revision, of knowledge. As Freire explains, “apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (72). In short, education is the process of students and teachers working together to co-create and co-interrogate, and learning to consider the world critically allows students to liberate themselves because they have critically examined the oppressions that they have experienced and learned to identify oppression within their own experiences.

Contemporary feminist scholars have begun working toward the similar goal of developing student-centered pedagogies. While these scholars largely fail to acknowledge Freire in these discussions, I argue that returning to his work is a crucial step in developing a feminist pedagogical model that is both student-centered and attentive to intersectional forms of oppression.

The Future of Intersectional Feminist Pedagogy

To date, the bulk of scholarship on feminist pedagogical practices consists of various personal anecdotes and theory-based propositions. As a field, it has not yet been determined what exactly constitutes "best practices." In fact, Laura Micciche contends that there may be no such thing as a uniform set of practices for feminist practitioners. She explains that feminist pedagogy, much like the feminist movement generally, is more about a flexible, ever-growing set of principles related to feminist activism than about a rigid set of qualifications that one must meet. This flexibility allows instructors the freedom to practice feminist pedagogy in ways that work best for their individual classrooms and for the students in those classrooms, but it also makes identifying ideal classroom practices difficult. I argue that rethinking current feminist pedagogical practices in light of fourth-wave feminists' attention to intersectionality and returning to Freire's critical literacy practices can allow scholars to begin working toward establishing a set of best practices for the field. At present, feminist educators rely too heavily on their personal conceptions of feminist pedagogy. By synthesizing activism with academics, contemporary feminist have an opportunity to improve and advance the field.

Although the political climate in the United States makes the future of education unclear, it also creates an exigency for reconsidering students learning processes. Feminist pedagogy, at its foundation, is about uniting students and educators in the common goal of actualizing social justice through teaching and learning methods. Freire uses the language of "oppression/liberation," but his goal is ultimately the same: "It is necessary that the weakness of the powerless is transformed into a force capable of announcing justice" (86). Returning to Freire's work and synthesizing it with fourth-wave feminists' movement to embrace intersectionality makes a new form of feminist pedagogy possible.

Intersectional feminist pedagogy will only become an actuality if scholars, practitioners, and activists work together, both in and out of the classroom, to advance the aims of fourth-wave feminism. Feminist pedagogy has, historically, always followed in the wake of the general feminist movement, and fourth-wave feminists must work to ensure that this pattern holds true. In looking to the future, scholars must also consider which areas are most in need of further research. In many cases, including this project, it is possible to theorize and make scholarly speculations about the future of feminist pedagogy, and using existing theory to re-evaluate current concerns is a crucial step in advancing this area of research.

However, there are many areas that will need additional consideration and will require both qualitative and quantitative study in order to advance. Assignment design, lecture practices, student engagement, classroom management, and learning outcomes should all be subject to re-evaluation in order to determine ways that they may be made more intersectional. These areas have benefited from feminist research in the past, and

they need to be reconsidered from a new perspective. Other areas of praxis, including assessment, are in dire need of feminist scholarly attention

Feminist assessment poses its own unique set of challenges. One of the most crucial scholarly examinations of feminist assessment is Kathleen Yancey's article "Historicizing Assessment." Feminist assessment, in short, means maintaining the power relationship of co-creators of knowledge rather than reassuming a traditional student/teacher power dichotomy. Assessment tends to be where many feminist practitioners struggle because traditional academic models dictate that students perform and teachers evaluate; with feminist pedagogy, this should not necessarily be the case. If students are expected to co-create knowledge, then it follows that they should also have input on the evaluation of that knowledge. For some instructors, student input takes place in personal "grade conferences." For others, it involves students self-assessing and reflecting.

While the body of scholarship is still growing on feminist assessment practices, it is undeniable that the role of assessment is a crucial factor in successfully employing feminist pedagogy in the classroom; however, in order for this to become a reality, contemporary feminists need to undertake additional research and articulate methods that address intersectional classroom concerns. Variance in methodology aside, however, the most crucial tenet of feminist pedagogy is its dedication to both theory and practice, and this holds true for both instructors and students. Instructors who practice feminist pedagogy seek not only to identify, but also to address, the feminist concerns within their classroom. They also seek not only to inform students of existing issues, but to teach them ways of critically engaging with difficult concepts on their own. As for the

students, feminist practitioners hope that their students can adopt a critical and literate lens when interacting with difficult concepts or issues. Most importantly, students will be afforded a space to learn how to speak and to think critically while coming to terms with a sense of personal agency that informs not only their writing, but also their actions

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Newly emerging feminist scholars (i.e., those who self-identify as fourth-wave feminists) are already working to synthesize their activism with their pedagogy; however, these acts have not yet become a part of the scholarly discourse surrounding the subject. Currently, suggested practices are not being brought forth based upon scholarly research but rather as a result of feminist educators' anecdotal experiences with fourth-wave activism. In order for leaders in the field to be able to move forward with feminist pedagogy, researchers must begin including intersectional theory in their work. In simple terms, scholars must catch up to activists so that intersectionality can become a part of scholarly, as well as mainstream, discourse. Speaking as an emerging scholar and educator, I contend that practicing successful intersectional feminist pedagogy can only happen if those in academia keep pace with activists.

Moving forward, fourth-wave feminist educators need to embrace intersectionality more fully in order to strengthen their pedagogical methods for new generations of students. By synthesizing advancements in the feminist movement generally with improvements in composition pedagogy, contemporary feminist practitioners have the potential to revitalize feminist composition pedagogy in order to better address current and future political and educational concerns that exist within classroom spaces. As Laura Micchiche explains, "engaging with intersectional identity could be a portal through which to visualize, encourage, and act meaningfully toward more just social relations in and beyond classrooms" (139).

In order to achieve a truly intersectional feminist movement, feminists must not only embrace intersectionality as an idea or cute catch phrase; they must also put in the

work to understand what it means to *be* intersectional in one's thinking and activism. While community-based activists are doing more work than ever to educate their feminist peers on how to advocate for intersectional concerns, the academic sphere has been painfully slow to achieve a similar level of progress. The discussion of queer student populations articulated in this thesis demonstrates but one example of a marginalized community that would benefit immensely from intersectional feminist pedagogy. The larger message of intersectional feminism is to acknowledge, respect, and embrace the multitude of identities that may exist within a single space; for educators, this space is the classroom. Feminist pedagogues have a responsibility to their students when it comes to putting their feminist principles into practice – whether those students are queer, nonwhite, differently abled, or belonging to another marginalized community, educators must be conscientious of the ways in which students' identities are not singular or uniform.

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