

Interrogating and Innovating Comparative and International Education Research

CIES Symposium – October 26-27, 2017

Hosted by:

George Mason University, Center for International Education

CIES Gender and Education Standing Committee

CIES South Asia Special Interest Group



Symposium statement: Destabilizing power and authority: Taking intersectionality seriously

Barbara Dennis, Indiana University.

Recently (August 2, 2017), Cameron Glover published a piece titled *Intersectionality Ain't For White Women* in which she describes the ways white women have upheld white supremacy and argues that white women cannot legitimately apply the term intersectionality to themselves. In that essay, Glover wrote, “**Intersectionality has never been, nor will it ever be, for white women.** Why? Because white women have never carried the weight of having to choose between their race or their gender when both mark them a visible target for oppression” (Glover, 2017). Indeed, Kimberley Crenshaw would agree that a white woman’s experiences are not intersectional in the way she herself used the word (Crenshaw, 1991).

Rebeca Garcilazo (2017) asked white women to stop acting politically and structurally as if their experiences are universally shared. She drew on global feminists of color to suggest that intersectional experiences are radically and qualitatively different than the experiences of white women. She gave many examples of this.

Kyli Rodriguez-Cayro (2017) wrote a letter to white feminists to ask, in very clear terms, that we own up to white supremacy and take action with women of color to work for racial justice and that we stand with people of color through every issue. She asked those of us who are white women to listen.

These voices of resistance are aimed at me - a white, feminist, activist-scholar whose privileged existence is neither peripheral nor neutral to this toxic sociopolitical context or to social research. Admonitions from women of color are necessary and important for me as a person as well as for me as a researcher who is engaged with Ugandans.

My privilege should not absent me from acknowledging white supremacy within academia, white feminism, and my own research. These popular feminists of color have centralized the violence of white supremacy and white privilege in the way I think of my research work. Centering this white violence is not a choice for women of color and therefore there would be no authentic way for me to engage with women of color in research efforts if I am to sideline racism, racial injustice, racial oppression and whiteness in the name of gender. And the same could be said for any research topic that might interest me.

I used to think there were many angles of criticalism and that with communicative intent, one could enter a critical space through any one of those angles. My own experiences with oppression have always been linked to my gender identity/presentation and so this was the angle through which I entered critical conversations. Now I see the fallacy in my thinking. For one, I had assumed a race-neutral experience of being able to choose “an angle” through which to engage in justice-oriented criticality. I lived this criticality as a woman in a sexist social milieu. But, this is precisely

Kimberley Crenshaw's (1991) point in distinguishing women of color from white women. Oppression – yes. Intersectionality – no. Secondly, by treating all possible critical angles (gender, race, nationality, economic status, and so on) as co-equal, I am not grasping the ways in which oppression and privilege (rather than categories of oppression) are co-constituted and I am inadequately admitting that my privilege serves to oppress others. My own privilege is not a salve for my oppression. Unfortunately, I can write and speak and talk all day long about my oppressive experiences with gender and never have to admit my white privilege. And I was doing this while believing it was a legitimate form of knowledge. As we know, knowledge is not neutral and does not exist outside of us. If my research and activism are not pushing against my own privilege and working to dismantle white supremacy I am failing women of color. And I am failing feminism. I am failing academia.

White supremacy and racism must be moved from the margins to the middle of our work in comparative and internal education. I want to listen to the wisdom of my colleagues of color who can guide me in this process. After the presidential election, my Facebook women of color “friends” pointed out that “white women need to get their shit together.”

References

- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.
- Glover, C. (2017, August 2). Intersectionality ain't for white women. *Wear Your Voice. Intersectional Feminist Media*. Retrieved from <https://wearyourvoicemag.com/identities/feminism/intersectionality-aint-white-women>
- Rodriguez-Cayro, K. (2017, March 13). Intersectional feminism: 6 things white women need to remember. *Luna Luna*. Retrieved from <http://www.lunalunamagazine.com/blog/dear-white-women-feminism>.

CITATION:

Dennis, B. (2017, October). Symposium statement. In CIES Symposium, *Destabilizing power and authority: Taking intersectionality seriously*. Conference Proceedings of the 2nd Comparative and International Education Symposium: Interrogating and Innovating CIE Research, George Mason University. Arlington, VA: GMU. Retrieved from: <https://cehd.gmu.edu/2017symposium/>

Other Symposium Sponsors



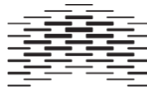
UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH CAROLINA
College of Education



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION



CIDEC
COMPARATIVE, INTERNATIONAL &
DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION CENTRE



OSLO AND AKERSHUS
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Center for Sustainable Development
EARTH INSTITUTE | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



UNIVERSITY OF
Redlands
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION