

FEM1100c
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Introduction:

Politics of reality Merlyn Frye

What is Oppression?:

- Something oppressed is smt caught between or among forces or barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the things' mobility or motion
- Unjust power of a whole system that reduce certain groups of people
- Involves a network of systematic barriers
- Not just a single force or barrier but a whole system of forces and barriers

We have to look at the barrier or force and ask certain questions:

- Who constructs and maintains it?
- Whose interests are served by its existence
- Is it part of a structure which tends to confine reduce or immobilize a group of people
- Is the person a member of the confined group
- Merlyn Frye metaphor: consider oppression as a bird stuck in a bird cage

Metaphor of bird cage: the bird cage is a metaphor for systemic oppression. If you look at one thing, you don't understand why he can't leave but if you look at the whole thing you understand why he can't leave.

Examples of oppressors: traffic laws, laws in general

HOWEVER just bcuz certain objects affects an individual everyday life it doesn't necessarily mean they are oppressed.

Race forward Video content:

What 4 levels of racism are affected:

(Internalized racism and interpersonal racism are together)

- Internalized racism: prejudice/blind posts/bias that we have within ourselves
- Interpersonal racism: when we act it out on each other; internalized racism on each other (act racist)
- Systemic racism:
 - Institutional: racist policies in schools, churches, laws etc. that routinely produce unjust outcomes for poc (only one institution)
 - Structural: unjust racist patterns; when we constantly focus on one area of racism it contorts our mind thinking (broader than institutional)

What does Smooth mean when he suggests that we need to be systemically aware? Why does he think we need to be systemically aware and how? (EXAM)

- Focusing on individuals is one of the biggest traps therefore we get a distorted view on racism
- Encourages us to see it only overt intentional acts
- Individual stories of individuals transcending racism
- Basically distorts racism
- It doesn't allow us to have real conversations on pressing racist issues (know some examples)
- "Barack Obama is president then there's no racism"
- We focus too much on individual acts of racism and distorts how we talk about. The problem that poc face are due to their deficiencies and we don't see the common patterns that play out across society

Systemic sexism

Anita Sarkeesian: The Oscars and Bechdel test

How does the bechdel test reveal systemic sexism in Hollywood?

- Bechdel test is...when there has to be two women min that talk to each other that does not revolve around a man
- Shows how women are constantly unrepresented in the media

Why there is no need for a bechdel test for men?

- Male characters are always wanted bcuz they are primarily important compared to women
- The assumption that men are "asked/wanted" to be seen on screen vs women by society
- Bechdel test is useful bcuz it can point out constant marginalized groups i.e women

Other marginalized groups neglected by Hollywood:

- LGBT
- Disabled
- Ugly people

Power

- Can be both constraining and productive (good & bad thing)
- In the past, it was the "ruling class". Top vs down (old conception of power). We tend to have the view that victims being powerless
- How does it work? Michel Foucault: theorizes power as belonging and being wielded by a general class (dominate and control others). He says "Power is everywhere. But where there is power, there is resistance."

Foucault's metaphor for social regulation of the **panopticon** (individual cells with one tower in the middle; the guards are watching so the prisoners behave and internalize the rules; over time you can have less and less guards and easier to maintain prison. Metaphor for how society functions → structure insures that we internalize the rules so again the victims of oppression internalize forces and barriers so we collude with the systems and impose them on others → internalized oppression. If we live in a sexist society, we pick up on that sexism and impose it on ourselves (slut shaming or victim blaming or colorism (privilege people of lighter skin than darker skin)).

- **She theorizes this**
- Power does not simply take the form of regulations imposed on passive people
- He says that in order to maintain a community that is behaved they need to believe that they are being watched by someone/something (1948)
- Victims internalize oppression which imposes on themselves i.e transgender who becomes afraid to come out bc he/she is afraid of what society will think

Choice. What does the expression "freedom of choice" mean to you?

- Not to feel pressured to make a choice.
- Freedom to direct your life without enforcement.
- Not to go by other people's expectations but your own.
- The elements of choice that lie not only in the individual in their mind or body but also often in the manipulation of the circumstances and manipulation of the options
- Sometimes a person's choice is manipulated to sometimes be seen as a freedom of choice

Marilyn Frye: metaphor of robbery. Having a gun to your head makes you change your choice. The elements of choice don't only lie in the individual but also in the manipulation of options and circumstances.

Often use maternal feminism

- "The values that made women good mothers and homemakers should be put to better society". This is why they should be able to vote.
- Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan were the leaders for the right to vote provincially

"May 24 1918, all female citizens aged 21+ became eligible to vote in federal elections, regardless of whether they had yet attained the provincial franchise."

- The idea of universal women rights is often problematic, bcuz in equality exists between women.

Choice feminism according to Anita Sarkeesian:

1. What is choice feminism?

Each individual woman determines what is liberating/empowers for herself (hyper individualism). Obscures the larger picture of the movement by focusing on the individual narrow notion. Individual notion of empowerment.

2. Why do “.. some choices that women make have an enormous negative impact on other women’s lives”?

Some women can make patriarchy work for them (white feminism), it’s a losing game for other women, it has ramifications on other women. Focuses on individual women’s success at the detriment of other women. We sometimes reinforce patriarchal values. Some women get benefits from patriarchy.

3. “choice feminism” obscures the fact that women don’t have real choice. Agree or disagree? Explain your answer.

By focusing on one individual woman, we forget about the rest of the world.

We already have predetermined rules dictated by patriarchy. Free choice: actually narrow choices. We can’t go beyond the spectrum.

System of oppression are maintained by our impact.

What are feminist and gender studies?

Feminism: equity; problems and solutions for women's oppression.

- Not just about studying women
 - No one general feminist theory/definition
 - First feminist studies in the 1970s
 - Can’t study gender without studying other forms of oppression
1. Seek to reconceptualize traditional systems of knowledge (traditionally centered around men)
 2. Supply missing information (woman’s perspective was missing from history)
 3. Attribute value to women and their work (we tend to devalue women and their work)
 4. Correct misconceptions (our bodies, mental capacities)

Non definitive definitions (Bell Hooks):

- **Feminism:** a mvt to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression (not having the word “female” in it --> includes people of other genders (not necessarily binary male/female) + feminism is for everybody)
- **Patriarchy:** institutionalized sexism

Bell Hooks says she leaves out the word “female”: all sexist thinking is the problem whether the perpetrator is female or male. Sexism is the problem, not men. She wants to emphasize the systemic nature of oppression/sexism.

Waves of feminism:

First wave:

- Mid 1800's-1930s
- Suffrage/suffragettes
- Suffrage: right to vote
- Radical, dangerous, harassed, death threats, many lost lives or jail
- Struggle for the right to vote

Critique:

- Maternal feminist arguments - things that make women maternal can be put to better use in society, to better society. Bcuz we were natural mothers, we were well suited to clean up politics.

Maternal feminism: "A woman's place is in the home; and out of it whenever she is called to guard those she loves and to improve conditions for them". - Nellie McClung

- The values that made women good mothers/homemakers, should be used to make society better, good moral and good caretakers.
- Not arguing that women should leave the home just that they should be able to vote bcuz they have good sense.
- Focused on spitak women, white married upperclass women or employed women.
- "On May 24 1918, all female citizens aged 21+ became eligible to vote in federal elections, regardless of whether they had yet attained the provincial franchise". (Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan) - Quebec 1940 (eurocentric - white feminist mvt)
- Aboriginal men & women got to vote in 1960
- Poc, japanese & Chinese men and women 1948
- Political obstacles put in the way for poc
- **The idea of universal rights is often problematic as inequality exists between women**
- To make matters worse, most of the suffragettes were promoters of the eugenics mvt (forced sterilization so that some people are "fit to reproduce and not others" → "better breeding" / superior and inferior races).
- We associate eugenics with nazi germany but it happened before
- Nellie mcClung: "all women are naturally the guardians of the race".
- Emily Murphy: "insane people are not entitled to progeny".
- Canada passed eugenics legislation 5 years before Germany (Hitler)

Why is this encyclopedia entry about suffrage in canada eurocentric and racist?

- Indigenous 1960
- Black women & asian 1948

Eugenics: the idea that some people weren't fit to reproduce

Alberta's sexual sterilization act 1928-1972 (BC has a similar act):

Banned in 1972 until then openly practiced state funded, most important in Alberta

Most at risk for forced sterilization were: "Would ruin superior genes"

- Men & women with disabilities
- New immigrants
- First nations children in residential schools
- Women deemed "sexually promiscuous"
- Men & women in institutions
- Marginalized people: eastern european, poor people, single mothers.

[Clips from *The Sterilization of Leilani Muir*]

Ain't I a Woman?

1. What is the significance of the phrase "Ain't I a woman" in her speech?

- Seen as less of a woman just because she's black.
- White woman privilege → label her as black instead of just a woman.
- ability/intellect - can do same tasks as men
- Racism - no matter what culture, still a woman
- Fear that it was about racism not sexism - women didn't want her in the conference "every newspaper in the land will have our cause mixed with abolition" (white women's cause)
- **Calls out white women for not including poc in the mvt**
- We didn't want different forms of oppression to mix - mixed with abolition
- Women work hard → woman can do all kinds of things. Reconceptualizing what it is to be a woman.
- Questioning definition of a woman, what happens to women who don't "fit the mold" - reevaluate and reinterpret what it means to be a woman and calls out the racism of the white women's mvt at the same time.
- Saying that, as woc, she should be considered a woman, but still questions what the definition of a woman is simultaneously

2. Discuss the role that racism played in defining womanhood for Lee Maracle.

- Racial hierarchy: indigenous first and then a woman
- Labelled as indigenous → inferior

- Whenever they asked her to teach it would always be about her indigenous cause
- Denial of womanhood “do they have feelings?”
- Race always comes before her womanhood → wasn’t able to participate in any feminist debate.
- Native females are not fit to be referred to as women (and are well below white men & native men)
- Only white women could speak about womanhood

3. How does Julia Serano define the gender binary? Cissexism?

- Gender binary: being no consensually assigned a female or male sex at birth (44)
- Cissexism/transphobia: forms of sexism that construe trans people’s gender identities and expressions as less legitimate than those of cis people.
- Cissexism can be seen in how individuals, organizations and governments often refuse to respect trans people’s lived experiences in our identified genres/sexes; in the discrimination we may face in employment or medical settings; and in how trans people are often targeted for harassment and violence (45)
- Cisgender: your gender matches the sex you were born with
- intersects with other forms of marginalization: victims of transphobic violence are overwhelmingly trans people who are poor, poc, and on the trans female/feminine spectrum
- Reinforces misconceptions that racism is just a problem of rare isolated individual actions/attitudes
- Encourages us to see individual stories of individual transcending racism as proof that there is no racism
- If we believe this then any problems/issues that poc must have an issue within themselves

Readings:

Lecture 1

1. Sojourner Truth - *Ain't I a Woman?*
 - Born into slavery in NY
 - Attended the First National Woman’s Rights Convention in Massachusetts in 1850 - only black woman present
 - Participant at the women's convention in Ohio. Some woman didn’t want her to speak “every newspaper in the land will have our cause mixed with abolition”
 - Conflict of being poc and woman/feminist

2. Lee Maracle - *I Am Woman*

- Native question
- “Each time I confronted white colonial society, I had to convince them of my validity as a human being. It was the attempt to convince them that made me realize that I was still a slave”
- “Racist ideology had defined womanhood for the native woman as nonexistent.”
- “I want to look across my kitchen table at the women of colour who share my life and see the genius of their minds, uncluttered by white opinion.”
- There’s a denial of the native woman’s womanhood by asking questions such as “do they have feelings?” --> “beneath such a remark isn’t there just a little coercion to behave and take without complaint whatever our brothers think “we have comin””?
- “The dictates of racism are that Native men are beneath white women and native females are not fit to be referred to as women.”
- “We are there to teach, to sensitize them or to serve them in some way.”

3. Julia Serano - *Making feminist and queer movements more inclusive*

Chapter 3

- “But everytime i pick up my pen, I’m afraid that i’ll paint myself into a corner, betrayed by words forged from soft vowel sounds and weak, diminutive connotations.”
- Second-wave feminism got caught in the myth that women are special bcuz of our biology → encourages the “game of opposites”
- Someone who admires trans men but not trans women --> another form of sexism
- “To set any standard that all women must meet is to commit an act of misogyny”

Chapter 5

- Trans feminism
- “Third wave feminism”
- Numerous forms of sexism
- Masculine-centrism
- Intersectional feminism: racism, ableism, classism.
- Anyone who fails to conform to the gender binary is marginalized by society
- Institutionalized cissexism (or transphobia) --> intersects with other forms of marginalization: victims of transphobic violence are overwhelmingly trans people who are poor, poc, and on the trans female/feminine spectrum
- Transmisogyny
- In the past: dismissal of trans feminism, depicting trans men as being “female” traitors who transition to attain male privilege.
- Some feminists argue that trans women have no right to participate in feminism bcuz we were not socialized female or bcuz we may have benefited from male privilege in the past.
- The point of feminism isn’t “oppression Olympics” but rather to challenge societal sexism and other forms of marginalization.