EXPLORING INTERSECTIONALITY, UNRAVELLING INTERLOCKING OPPRESSIONS:
FEMINIST NON-CREDIT LEARNING PROCESSES

by

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Abstract

The concepts of intersectionality and interlocking identities came out of needs raised by communities and then academics wrote about it. This dissertation examines these concepts and how these resonate with the ways that feminist educators conceptualize and facilitate non-credit learning processes with women.

This research focuses on 10 differently-located feminist educators and the processes they lead that meet a range of learning goals. Specifically, this research examines the learning practices that these educators used to help women learners gain a consciousness around their identity and issues of power and oppression. I then discuss how these practices resonate with the theoretical frameworks of intersecting and interlocking oppressions.

Anti-oppression, feminist informed research and feminist standpoint theories informed the research approach. The Critical Appreciative Process, which builds on the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) method, was used to explore what is working within feminist non-credit learning processes. In addition, two case studies were elaborated on in order to examine the learning practices that were particularly successful.
The educators reflected on several barriers involved in bringing differently-located women together to explore and address the power dynamics associated with power and oppression. These included the defensiveness, denial and avoidance associated with acknowledging and addressing privilege. The educators also shared effective practices for addressing such barriers. Key practices included creating an environment for difficult conversations, working intergenerationally, using theoretical frameworks to deconstructing interpersonal dynamics occurring in the group and providing tools to draw on everyday experiences and challenge (inappropriate) behaviours. Additionally, specific activities for raising learners’ awareness of their own complex and multiple identities and how these identities are co-constructed through interactions with others were detailed.

This study revealed the limitations of intersectionality and interlocking identities frameworks in praxis, as well as the ways in which an awareness of identity, difference and power creates an entry point for intersectional and interlocking awareness that aids feminist movements. This research makes a contribution to strengthening the praxis of feminist educators facilitating non-credit processes. Within feminist theorizing, this research also makes an important contribution in contextualizing intersectionality and interlocking identities frameworks within a range of feminist non-credit learning practices.
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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

Purpose/Objective of the Research

Solidarity within and across feminist movements is a goal shared by many of the educators I spoke with, as is addressing the barriers that impede progress towards this goal. The need to address disparities and tensions between differently-located\textsuperscript{1} women has long presented challenges to the feminist movement.\textsuperscript{2} These tensions play out in the many spaces where women learn and organize for progressive social change. The issue of understanding identity and the ways in which differently-located women can address and work across differences is central within feminist learning spaces and processes. This research is motivated out of an interest to explore ways to address the tensions around difference that have been raised both within feminist thought in academia and feminist practice in educating and organizing spaces within communities in order to further feminist movements for social change.

My Entry Point

I believe that working towards social justice is a need for all, rather than work to be done on behalf of Others. Based on my practice as an adult/popular educator, I believe, as others have theorized, that collective learning spaces provide emancipatory possibilities for social change (Allen, 2000; Freire, 1973, 1994; Giroux, 1983, 1993; Kichelou & McLaren, 2000; Mezirow, 1990, 1995; Sarachild, 2000).

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\textsuperscript{1} The terms “differently-located” acknowledges the variety of social locations that an individual occupies. Social location refers to facets of identity such as gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, race, among other examples.\textsuperscript{2} I note that the “feminist” movement is often written about as a singular movement. Within this research, I refer to women’s movements to honour the many different ways that women organize for social change.
I am in solidarity with a “multi-centred women’s movement in which all differently-located women in their particularity are equally central and in which the particular conditions of all women’s lives, with their different identities, are equally the general condition of women” (Miles, 1996 p. xii). I support educational practices that empower women and their communities. I strongly believe that women learning together across their differences can create powerful knowledge and fuel movements for positive social change. As a result of these beliefs therefore a large part of my work as an educator has focused on facilitating non-credit learning processes for girls and women. I have co-designed and facilitated processes for women in a variety of settings over the last 10 years, including workplaces, settlement services, continuing education and grassroots organizations, primarily in Ontario.

In my practice, I have come across many challenges in consciousness-raising processes that require women to work across differences, and I have had a wide variety of colleagues ask me questions about how to best do this work. I believe that women must work to understand and address their inequitable power dynamics in order to find ways to work together to create solidarity. I believe that if they engage in this work, women can begin to act together as a powerful force for positive social, political and economic change.

The Importance of Solidarity and Addressing Difference in Feminisms

Within this dissertation, I am concerned with processes that equip women in understanding differences in ways that productively further feminist movements for positive social change. To engage in this inquiry, I navigate the potentially creative tension between promoting solidarity and highlighting the importance of the differences between women.
Concerns surrounding difference and how differences between women are acknowledged and addressed have a long and deep history in women’s movements, and these need to be acknowledged without becoming paralyzing. For example, historical accounts of the suffragette movement misleadingly state that women in Canada got the vote in 1918, while women of colour were only granted the right to vote decades later. Many have argued that women of colour, (dis)abled women and LGBTQ women (among others) were similarly overlooked in much second wave feminist practice, which focused on sexual liberation and the right to work outside the home – issues which did not reflect the lived experience or speak to the political priorities of many women. Morrison (1992) and hooks (1994) note that, historically, women of colour have been overly sexualized within society and have been forced to work outside the home, often at the expense of raising their own families.

Transnational theorists have since pointed out that such theoretical and strategic weaknesses are the product of problematic dynamics, which occur when relatively privileged feminists take up issues on behalf of different, less privileged women, particularly in countries that are geo-politically marginalized and exploited. Jindy Pettman (2002) calls this the “missionary approach” to saving Third World women and it normalizes the absence of the voices of the women whose concerns are being raised. It also creates a distorted representation of women of colour in theoretical writing and in organizing practice (in Dhruvarajan & Vickers, 2002, p. 12). The “missionary approach” assumes that women can speak for one another because they have common interests (Dhruvarajan & Vickers, 2002, p. 6), and this homogenizes and reifies the category of women (Kaplan et al, 2000, p. 71). As Kaplan argues, it is the

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3 Historical accounts state that women’s suffrage was won in Canada in 1918 (Parliament of Canada, 2007). This only applied to White women. Chinese and Indo-Canadian women were not granted the right to vote until 1947, Japanese-Canadians women were not granted to right to vote until 1948 (Citizen Shift, n.d.) and women with Indian status were not able to vote until 1960 (Wikipedia, Universal Suffrage).
manufacturing of commonality that has created fragmentation in the women’s movement (Kaplan et al, p. 7).

Similarly, a number of feminists have also described how unequal inclusion and participation create disparities between differently-located women in feminist learning and organizing spaces (hooks, 1984; Rebick, 2005). Many feminist scholars recount their personal experiences of this type of marginalization in feminist organizing spaces (Cordova, 2000; hooks, 1984, 1994; Morrison, 2000; Uttal, 1990). Still other scholars have used post-colonial or critical race theory to describe the processes or mechanics by which such Othering takes place (Ahmed, 2000; Frankenberg, 1993; Hage, 2000; Razack, 1998).

The kind of solidarity that is central to feminist movements that creates support networks necessary for women to sustain one another as they challenge patriarchy (Walters, 1996) must thus be grounded, not in a notion of simple abstract “identification,” but in “identification-with: identification with others, identification with values and ideals, identification with ourselves, as individuals and as collectives” (Weir, 2008 p. 111). For, as many other feminists have observed, we need to look specifically at difference as a way to sustain this solidarity (Cole & Luna, 2010). Many feminist scholars and practitioners have accepted the challenge of building solidarity through a central recognition of difference. This is the context within which I look at difference because, as Angela Miles (1996) notes,

to devise ways of working together and forms of solidarity that can emphasize and affirm both our commonality and our diverse conditions, feminists must tackle in our movement the deep divisions of power that structure the very society in which we are embedded (p. 59).

An important aspect of solidarity is the development of alliances across differences (Ostrove, Cole & Oliva, 2009) and having political consciousness to be able to do this
(Greenwood, 2008). In this research I will consider how differences among woman can best be explored to further feminist movements that work in solidarity with one another.

**Research Setting**

As mentioned, some scholarly work focuses on processes that unite women (Ostrove, Cole & Oliva, 2009). Other scholarly\(^4\) work focuses on how inequities between women happen in organizing women’s movements (Alarcon, 1990; hooks, 1984; Rebick, 2005; Wendell, 1997), in women centred organizations (Ferree, M. & Yancey Martin, 1995), and in Women's Studies classrooms (Bannerji, 1991; Tinsdell, 1998). However, within academic discourses, there is little said about how to acknowledge and address differences while still focusing on the goal of cohesion within and between women’s movements in practice. Specifically, there is little theorized about facilitated learning processes that take place outside of the Women’s Studies classroom. This inquiry addresses this gap in its exploration of the potential of feminist non-credit learning spaces to change ways of knowing and acting in practice.

I focus on feminist non-credit learning spaces because of their potential to provide counter-hegemonic spaces, as opposed to the “chilly climate” of other contexts such as formal learning institutions that may prevent women from realizing their capabilities (Blakemore et al., 1997; Chilly Collective, 1995; Ng, 1993). These processes produce really useful knowledge (Barr, 1999) through focusing on the experiences of women and building theory and strategies for action around the stories women share about their lived realities. Furthermore, the non-credit

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\(^4\)I use the term scholarly writing to encompass books, anthologies and articles published in academic journals. I contrast this term with popular writing, which generally is written without theoretical citations and intended to speak to a broader audience.
learning environment alleviates learners’ anxiety about performing in order to gain the educator's approval.\textsuperscript{5} This lack of anxiety enables consciousness-raising.

I focus specifically on women-only processes because I am interested in the power dynamics of dominance and submission among women. Within co-ed groups, power dynamics between women are altered or usurped by the presence of men, whose participation may add different elements of patriarchal power beyond the scope of this research.

In this inquiry I explored a variety of feminist non-credit learning contexts in metropolitan areas in Ontario. To represent the scope within these processes I recruited and selected feminist educators who facilitate 1) learning processes that support social justice organizing that take place within autonomous organizing and/or self help groups, 2) learning processes with clients that take place in women’s social service agencies, 3) workplace organizational change processes that take place in women-centred workplaces and 4) union workplace training for women. In these contexts, I identified a range of feminist learning practices used by feminist educators working with differently-located women learners. In particular, my goal was to speak with feminist educators about processes that they found successfully assisted differently-located women in understanding their identity in relation to those of others.

\textsuperscript{5}As opposed to processes that use standardized curriculum, grades or credit. Standardized curriculum refers to learning objectives and processes that are predetermined and set out to be exactly the same each time they are delivered. Standardized curriculum is often used in formal academic settings in order to test learners and compare their scores by using the same questions and scoring procedures each time. With the increasing professionalization in non-credit training and learning environments, the goals of standardized curriculum are becoming more widespread.
**Research Focus**

I was inspired to do this research in order to provide approaches and frameworks for thinking through how to conduct consciousness-raising processes that enable women learners to effectively understand and address differences between them while supporting each other to work towards common goals. Consequently, this study is a solution-oriented inquiry into feminist non-credit learning practices that achieve this goal. In this dissertation, I employ a critical version of the Appreciative Inquiry approach (Madruger-Watkins & Mohr, 2001) in order to focus on what is working in existing feminist non-credit learning spaces and processes.

I began this research by looking broadly at how feminist educators lead non-credit learning practices that support the development of differently-located women’s consciousnesses, how this relates to the achievement of a feminist standpoint\(^6\), and how these processes enable differently-located women to come together in anti-oppressive ways that recognize diversity and do not (re)create hierarchies of oppression. However, after completing a few interviews, it was clear that some feminist non-credit learning approaches were more fruitful to explore than others. I decided to hone the scope of my inquiry to focus on how feminist educators are facilitating women learners’ consciousness around women’s multiple differences based on their social locations, power and oppression. I looked specifically at how educators were promoting this understanding in complex and nuanced ways that resonated with theorists’ conceptualization of intersectionality and interlocking oppressions. These concepts provided an interesting point of departure given that they emerged as an academic response to a need in communities for anti-oppressive frameworks.

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\(^6\) I am inspired by Nancy Hartsock’s conceptualization of feminist standpoint, which argues that a feminist standpoint is gained through struggling to achieve an understanding of the world based on the experience of being oppressed as women. However, I go beyond this definition and consider that achieving a feminist standpoint includes women’s efforts to understand their identities of privilege.
The centrality of intersectionality.

In this dissertation, I look at identity as a way to explore the connections between social locations and women’s lived experiences and knowledges. Identity is ever-changing and multilayered, and it must be examined through a lens that appreciates this complexity. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) speaks of the triple bind of negotiating her identity as woman, racialized Other and poet/writer. She reflects on this situation, saying: “no matter what positioning she decides to take, she will sooner or later find herself driven into situations here she feels she must choose from among three conflicting identities” (p.6). Similarly, in discussing her identity, Didi Khayatt (1994 in James & Shadd) recounts that she has to navigate race, class, and ethnicity, among other variables, when finding her way through the immigration process and her student life.

Intersectionality theory addresses the complexities of identity. As an epistemological approach, intersectionality enables a nuanced outlook that allows different aspects of identity to exist in tandem and does not view individuals as the sum of all facets of identity.

The term “intersectionality” was coined by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw (1989), who used it to draw on the image of an intersection. For Crenshaw, the intersection evokes the place where each person’s multiple aspects of identity, or social locations, meet as a crossroads where all facets of identity are simultaneously separate and joined. Through this metaphor, Crenshaw sought to express that the more locations of oppression one occupies - considering the barriers of racism, sexism, heteronormativity, classism (among others) - the more difficult it is to cross the intersection or exist free of impediment (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality is a way to conceptualize how oppressions are socially constructed and affect different bodies differentially. Crenshaw’s explanation of intersectionality is central to understanding the complex and
marginalized aspects of identity that women in communities organizing for social change have long been aware of.

The lived realities of women of colour have called for an intersectional approach. Within grassroots organizing, women of colour have called for recognition of difference, and women with marginalized aspects of identity precipitated Women’s and Gender Studies programs to theorize notions of difference. Historically, there has been a strong relationship between grassroots feminist practices and academic feminist thought. Within grassroots organizations, women of marginalized identities called for a recognition of difference that precipitated Women's and Gender Studies programs. Yet, while these activists theorized notions of difference, academics articulated intersectionality, making this concept an interesting point of connection and tension between feminist theory and practice.

Still, while much has been said about difference in feminist theory, overall this theorizing has failed to impact ways of knowing or acting outside of the academic domain. My goal within this research is to consider the framework of intersectionality and interlocking oppressions as articulated within academia, and to explore the ways in which feminist educators show an awareness of women’s multiple differences within feminist non-credit learning practices, which are the subject of these theories.

**Research Question**

Specifically, this inquiry asks: what learning and/or pedagogical practices do feminist educators use that they feel help (or do not help) women learners to gain a consciousness around
aspects of their identity and issues of power and oppression, particularly in integrating issues of intersecting and interlocking oppressions into women learners' understanding?

I do not believe the focus on consciousness-raising practice is new, although the focus on intersectionality and interlocking identities is unique within this project. In either case, a great deal of practice exists that has not been codified in a widely accessible way. There is a lack of writing about feminist non-credit learning because knowledge in this area is primarily shared through practice or disseminated through small publications created by organizations and grassroots groups, as opposed to through scholarly writing. This research builds on what is known and aims to explore what learning and pedagogical approaches are working, as it engages women educators in a dialogue about how they grapple with these questions in their learning practices.

**Definition of Terms**

Many of the key terms in this thesis are used by a variety of theorists to signify different ideas and are therefore rather contentious. In the section that follows, I elaborate how I approach terms related to the research question. In the following section, I elaborate on my approach to the terms in an effort to ensure clarity.

**Learning and/or pedagogical practices.**

I use the word “pedagogy” to refer to principles and methods of instruction; activities of educating, instructing or teaching; or activities that impart knowledge or skill (Cayne, 1988). I also think of learning and pedagogical practices as the self-reflexivity and/or the theoretical
perspectives that inform the ways in which educators create learning processes and conduct themselves in a learning space.

*Feminist educators.*

I consider the word “feminist” to refer to a woman who acknowledges multiple systems of oppression and the ways in which these operate. Operating from this basis, feminists work to address oppressions through social movements (as opposed to promoting the individual interests of some women). I define “educator” broadly as “a person distinguished for [her] educational (teaching or training in such a way as to develop mental, moral and physical powers) work” (Cayne, 1988, p. 298). I believe that educators are defined by their participation in the work of guiding others in their learning, and I do not place importance on formal credentials, or particular job titles.

Therefore, I use the term “feminist educator” to refer to women who are engaged in educational work that promotes the analysis of women’s multiple oppressions and participation in social movement action aimed at dismantling these. This definition, and the definition I used in my recruitment materials, is purposefully broad because a narrower definition of “feminist” would be contested among the community of educators with whom I wished to connect through this study.

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7 In my recruitment of educators I simplified this definition of feminist educator to mean those woman who acknowledges patriarchy and the ways in which it operates and works to address this oppression through social movements (as opposed to promoting the individual interests of some women). In reality I consider it critical to consider multiple and intersecting oppressions when working with women.
Woman/women.

What comprises a woman is another hotly contested area within feminist theory and practice. For the purposes of this investigation I use the term “women” inclusively, to include those individuals who were born female and identify as women, transgendered women who challenge normative gender roles, and Male to Female (MtF) transsexuals who have undergone gender reassignment and identify as a woman.

Consciousness.

“Consciousness” is an important term in this research as it relates to consciousness-raising (CR) practice, which is a core feminist non-credit learning practice that I describe later in the chapter in the section entitled Previous Research in this Area.

In order to define “CR,” it is first important to understand what it means to be conscious. “Consciousness” is defined as “the state of being conscious, especially being in one’s senses and aware of one’s surroundings; mental activity, including emotions and thought; the upper level of mental life, as opposed to the subconscious mental processes” (Cayne, 1988, p. 207).

I see consciousness as a process of becoming, not a static state of being. My perspective is greatly informed by the work of Paulo Freire (1973) whose pedagogical practices facilitate the increase of consciousness. He theorized that gaining consciousness occurs in four stages: intransitive consciousness, where fulfilling subsistence needs is the focus and oppression seems inevitable; the semi-transitive or magical stage, which is fatalistic, accepting the socio-economic status quo; the transitive or naïve phase, where people begin to see that they have a hand in creating reality; and, finally, critical consciousness, where people begin to critically question and act on their reality, rejecting practices of dehumanization (Freire, 1973, p. 44). I also draw
heavily on feminist understandings of consciousness. Sandra Lee Bartky’s (1990) morphology, for example, sees women’s consciousness as comprised of the pre-feminist stage, where one considers a woman’s condition natural, inevitable, inescapable, or biologically determined, and feminist consciousness, (where women stop seeing themselves as victims).

**Consciousness-raising.**

In the context of this dissertation, consciousness-raising refers to a pedagogical approach or learning process, which emerged as the key analytical method/political tool of the women’s movement during the 1960s and 1970s. As a political practice, consciousness-raising was designed to enable feminists to analyze the world and patriarchy through the exploration of diverse women’s varied and common experiences.

According to Pamela Allen, who documented the small group process of consciousness-raising, it involves four stages: 1) opening up, 2) sharing, 3) analysing and 4) abstracting. She described how opening up and sharing allowed women to experience therapeutic value as they exposed hidden areas within themselves. This was achieved as women were able to deepen their analysis of their lived experiences; the collective and critical analysis of a group allowed them to understand their personal stories at a societal level (2000). The process of analysis was done collectively using group members’ lived experiences, and was facilitated either by going around the room and asking key questions of one another or by cross examining one person’s experience (Sarachild, 2000). Consciousness raising practice is valuable when it involved not just the sharing of experience, but the collective process of critically examining and deconstructing experience in an environment of mutual trust.
This practice played a central role in supporting the development of women’s social and political awareness in a way that created new social actors for wider participation in the women’s movement. As I see it, consciousness-raising contributed to the movement, more than it was a movement in and of itself, although in some of the literature the terms movement, methodology or activity are used interchangeably. Therefore, for the purposes of this inquiry I will approach consciousness-raising as a movement building methodology, or a collection of methods used to further women’s liberation.

Identity.

By “identity” I mean “social categories in which an individual claims membership as well as the personal meaning associated with those categories” (Ashmore et al in Shields, 2008). Identity includes one’s positioning, as well as the associated meanings connected to social locations such as ability (Begum, 1992), race (Razack, 1989), citizenship (Schugurensky, 2005), socio-economic class, gender, religious affiliation, sexual orientation and ethnicity, among others. Due to the connection between identity and lived experiences, identity can also strongly influence one’s perspectives, ideas and knowledge.

The concept of power is central to understanding the complex ways that identity takes shape, as identity is strongly affected by discourses of social difference and inequality. Along these lines, notions of self or identity are never neutral; “(they) are always tied to shifting power relation” (Burke & Jackson, 2007, p. 112-115). I believe that aspects of identity are self-concepts that take multiple and sometimes contradictory forms. How an individual identifies varies and shifts throughout a lifetime. This is in part because individuals' identity develops through coming
to understand who they are in relation to others and depending on the context (James & Shadd, 1994).

I use the term “identity” from an intersectionality perspective, referring to the collection of social categories to which an individual claims membership. Identity is a central concept to this dissertation, and I will continue to return to it throughout the research. Throughout this dissertation, I use identity to refer to social categories or locations (as opposed to political identities) unless otherwise noted.

**Intersectionality.**

I touched briefly on intersectionality previously in this chapter to frame the research focus, situating the metaphor of the intersection as the way in which each person’s multiple social locations, or aspects of identity, meet as a crossroads. The metaphoric space of a crossroads allows us to imagine the way that all facets of identity are both separate and joined (Crenshaw, 1989).

As mentioned above, intersectionality is a way to conceptualize how oppressions are socially constructed and affect different bodies differentially. The term “intersecting oppressions” refers to the way in which multiple aspects of oppression - the barriers of racism, sexism, heteronormativity, and classism, among others – create impediments and increase the systemic violence an individual will face. Intersectionality understands that aspects of identity do not function independently and must be understood as connected.

As an addendum to nuance Crenshaw’s understanding of intersectionality, it is also important to acknowledge that all women experience some form of oppression as a result of
patriarchy. Oppression takes different forms depending on a woman’s configuration of identities and experiences. So, while acknowledging that multiple oppressions may be compounding, as Crenshaw notes, I want to avoid the hierarchization of oppressions and the presumption that (race, class, gender and other) oppressions are always compounded, in favour of noticing the complex specificities of each type of oppression that differently-located women face.

I will elaborate more on intersectionality in Chapter Two, as the concept is one of the epistemological and theoretical groundings of this inquiry.

**Interlocking Oppression.**

“Interlocking oppression” is defined by Razack & Fellows (1998) as the way in which systems of oppression come into existence in and through one another so that class exploitation could not be accomplished without gender and racial hierarchies; imperialism could not function without class exploitation, sexism, heterosexism, and so on (p. 1). Interlocking oppression accounts for how race, class, gender (as well as other aspects of identity) co-constitute one another in ways that cannot be separated in White supremacist capitalist patriarchy (Razack & Fellows, 1998, p. 3)

In this sense, interlocking refers to how aspects of oppression manifest on a total systemic level. This application of interlocking allows us to understand that if only patriarchy existed this would create racism, or if only racism existed this would engender classism and so on. In other words, these oppressive systems are interwoven, interdependent and co-constitute one another within society.
Interlocking identities.

In this dissertation I utilize the concept of interlocking to also consider the co-construction of power associated with social locations at an individual level. I refer to “interlocking identities” as the phenomenon by which individuals’ social locations of privilege and oppressions are co-constructed through contact with others (see also Hage 2000).

I will also elaborate more on interlocking oppressions and identities in Chapter Two, as this concept, paired with intersectionality, is one of the epistemological and theoretical groundings of this inquiry.

The Research and Lack of Research in This Area

Several genres of writing explore theories and practices surrounding feminist non-credit learning processes that facilitate women’s consciousness of aspects of their identity, power and oppression. These theoretical areas include adult education, popular writing on feminist non-credit learning, and scholarly writing within women and gender studies. I will look briefly at the literature in this field that is relevant to my study.

Adult Education

Historically, adult education literature has dealt with women and women’s learning in a peripheral matter. Miles (1989) observed that feminist praxis has made great contributions to

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As noted previously, I use the term “popular writing” to mean documents that are generally written without theoretical citations and that are intended to speak to a broader audience than scholarly writing. I contrast popular with scholarly writing, which encompasses books, anthologies and articles published in academic journals.
adult education that has remained unacknowledged. Bonnie Burstow (1994) similarly remarked that adult education has paid very little attention to feminists. According to Edith Smith’s (1992) critical examination of work on women’s learning, there are analytical and empirical gaps in the literature in which women are subjects within adult education research (Smith, 1992). Furthermore, within existing research on women’s learning, Smith found that “few people work from the position of there being a specificity of women’s experience with learning” (Smith, 1992, p. 60).

Fifteen years ago, there was no focus on feminist non-credit learning for women, and still there is little written on the topic. Within current scholarly writing on feminist learning practices, the main focus is on learning within women and gender studies classrooms. The focus on academic contexts is problematic because curriculum is pre-determined and student learning is subject to evaluation (Lather, 1991, Luke & Gore, 1992). In contrast, I chose to look at non-credit contexts, where I believe there is a possibility for educators and learners to each act more reflexively.

**Popular Writing on Non-Credit Feminist Learning Processes**

Popular writing on non-credit feminist learning processes generally take the form of training resources and is often only found in self-published booklets or “zines” that are not widely circulated. Many are self published, making a comprehensive search for all materials in the field challenging. Some examples do exist, however. The main examples that relate to this investigation are works in the areas of feminist popular education, conscious-raising practice and the Sagaris Institute for the Study of Feminist Thought.
**Feminist popular education.**

Popular education is a process of non-formal, adult education committed to helping grassroots groups work for social change (Kane, 2001). The focus of the learning is on action and reflection aimed at uncovering important knowledge for defending the interests of everyday people. The process is guided by an educator who is not formally trained, and whose interests align with the people with whom she is learning and organizing.

However, popular education has been charged with primarily focusing on class, to the exclusion of other oppressions (Nadeau, 1996a, Weiler, 1991). Feminist popular education seeks to transform popular education through looking not just at class, but integrating race, sexuality and ability. It also redefines class by considering the “unpaid work of caring for children and maintaining a family, and providing basic services to the community” (Nadeau, 1996a, p.6). Feminist popular education also seeks to incorporate the “physical, spiritual and emotional, as well as the mental dimension (Nadeau, 1996a, p.6, Nadeau, 1996b).

Feminist popular education resources include Denise Nadeau’s (1996a) training guide, *Counting our Victories: Popular Education and Organizing*, which outlines training modules and resources for use in feminist popular education processes. Another such resource is *Women’s Self-Help Educational Kit* by the North Island Women’s Society in Courtney British Columbia, which features one group exercise relevant to this inquiry called “Dealing with Difference.”
**Consciousness-raising practice.**

I consider CR practice to be the root of all non-formal feminist learning processes. For this reason, I draw heavily on the feminist group Redstockings’ (2000) CR methodology in this investigation.

Redstockings disseminated pamphlets with guidelines which outlined the CR method used for the movement building to further women’s liberation. The guidelines suggested that CR be carried out in sessions that were leaderless and non-hierarchical. Redstockings' CR methodology consisted of a small group of 10-15 women who gathered once a week to take turns speaking on pre-selected themes\(^9\). Other popular documents include Judith Brown’s (1969) pamphlet, *How To Start A Group*, and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Dana Densmore’s (1968) pamphlet, *No More Fun and Games; A Journal of Female Liberation*.

**Sagaris institute for the study of feminist thought.**

The Sagaris Institute for the Study of Feminist Thought was a feminist learning space that focused on political theory and action. The Sagaris Collective ran the Institute as a series of non-credit workshops during the summer of 1975, featuring key feminist instructors (Associated Press, 1975). The purpose of the gathering was to meet “the need for ideological development” in the women’s movement (Ford Foundation, 2010).

There are several written sources that recount experiences of the Sagaris Institute; yet they vary widely, and it is difficult to pinpoint the exact methodologies used in these feminist

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\(^9\) Examples of themes include love, marriage, sex, work, femininity, how one came to women’s liberation, motherhood, aging or competition with other women.
learning processes. These disparities may be attributed to the diversity amongst the instructors, the learners or the movement itself.

As Terry Wolverton (2002) reflected:

Each woman who came seemed to carry a different expectation of what the Institute was supposed to be. Some saw it as an extended conference for political networking; others sought academic rigour. Still others viewed it as a boot camp for activists, the launching pad for the inevitable feminist revolution, while many seemed content to kick back and enjoy their time at “lesbian summer camp” (p 33).

As a result of conflict and dissension on the basis of personal and political differences, the Sagaris Collective formed splinter groups (Jackie St. Joan, 1983). This historic conflict of the Sagaris Institute illustrates the need to address difference within non-credit feminist learning processes. In this way, the work of Sagaris provides rich lessons for non-credit feminist learning processes and spaces.

*Califia community.*

Califia was a community centred non-credit learning process in California informed by the Sagaris tradition of “live-in sessions” (Murphy, p. 139). For many summers Califia provided an “opportunity to participate in a dynamic process of creating and living feminist theory” and to “recognize and affirm our differences as we celebrate our sisterhood” (Murphy, p. 139).

To meet the needs of women of colour several Califia participants created a Woman of Colour network (Silva, 1983). Their initiative to organize a weekend camp for women of colour raised tensions between Califia’s predominantly White organizing collective and the new network. Carmen Silvia (1983) noted, “When it seemed like [an issue] would be the argument
that we would hate each other for, we would stop and take a look at our purpose – suddenly our positions would soften and we could reach a consensus” (p. 163).

The Women of Colour Network and camp showed participants that healing can take place through conflict with role models and a willingness to work in coalition (Silva, 1983, p. 166-167). This model provides a strong example of working together and bridging differences.

**Intersectionality as an educational approach.**

Intersectionality is an academic framework that has only recently been employed as a way to conceptualize learning practices. For example, intersectionality has been embraced as a theoretical framework within formal learning settings. Murphy et al.’s (2009) book, *Incorporating Intersectionality: Social Work Practice, Research, Policy and Education*, provides one such example.

More relevant to this inquiry, however, is Joanna Simpson’s (2009) *Everyone Belongs: a Toolkit for Applying Intersectionality*, created through the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW). The CRIAW toolkit contains three “Community Education Activities for Exploring Intersectionality.” These activities focus on learning about different subject positions and oppressions in community education contexts. Two of these activities take a liberal approach and do not mention the possibility of oppressions compounding one another.¹⁰ While the CRIAW toolkit has inherent flaws, it provides an interesting reference because it represents an educational model similar to the practices which I explore and put forth in this inquiry.

¹⁰ As mentioned previously, it is also important to acknowledge that oppressions are compounding when an individual has multiple aspects of oppression and that oppressions also exist in different forms for all women, including those with privileged aspects of identity.
**Scholarly Writing on Non-Credit Feminist Learning Processes**

The popular grassroots practices of informal learning, feminist popular education and consciousness-raising have become the subjects of scholarly theoretical reflection and analysis, in addition to theories on intersectionality and interlocking identities that anchor this investigation. In this section I outline the scholarly writing that has been developed in the areas of intersectionality and interlocking identities, informal feminist learning processes, feminist popular education and consciousness-raising.

**Intersectionality and interlocking identities.**

As mentioned above, the theoretical framework of intersectionality and interlocking identities emerged from feminist academia as a means to account for multiple and converging aspects of identity and the ways in which these compound identity-based oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). This approach is important to this study because it informs my thoughts about the ideal outcomes of activities and processes. It also assists in theorizing differently-located feminist educators’ situated knowledges, which co-constitute one another and contribute to the development of a feminist standpoint.

Theoretical approaches to intersectionality and interlocking identities are further expanded upon in the discussion of research epistemologies in Chapter Two and throughout this dissertation.
Informal feminist learning processes.

Informal learning happens through daily interactions in a variety of settings, such as at home or in the workplace. It does not have a pre-established or intentional curriculum but is situational. Informal learning may have someone acting as an informal guide or elder, but it is generally self-directed (Livingstone, 2001).

Scholarly writings that focus on feminist informal learning processes in Canada are sparse. Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin (1995), *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women’s Movement*, provides one example of documented informal feminist learning. This book explores how informal learning in feminist movements led groups of women to create feminist organizations, and it documents the ongoing learning in Canada that occurred in the process.

Studying informal learning contexts provides the opportunity to examine how social movement learning occurs for individuals and within groups. Within this investigation, however, I am interested in focusing on the role that the educator plays in facilitating women’s learning, which would not be possible in informal contexts that are leaderless by definition.

Feminist popular education.

There is a large body of scholarly work that documents and reflects on the practice of feminist popular education (Boler, 1999; Butterwick, 1978; Doerge, 1992; Pritchard Hughes, 1998; Weiler, 1991). Because this research focuses on learning processes within Ontario I looked specifically for feminist popular education that took place in a Canadian or a North American context. Though these sources rarely touch on the Canadian or even a North American context several facilitated non-credit learning processes are documented in the book *Gender in Popular*
Education: Methods for Empowerment (Walters & Manicom, 1996). However, some examples in the volume are conducted with co-ed group from a gender mainstreaming perspective. In contrast, I am looking specifically at processes with all-women groups led by educators whose pedagogies are informed by feminist analysis.

Consciousness-raising.

A great deal of scholarly writing examines the practice of consciousness-raising (CR).

Consciousness-raising is defined as:

“the name given to the feminist practice of examining one’s personal experience in light of sexism; i.e., that theory which explains women’s subordinate position in society as a result of a cultural decision to confer direct power on men and only indirect power on women” (Gornick, 2000, p.287).

This practice focused on promoting the awareness that, “we women must begin to unabashedly learn to use the word ‘love’ for one another. We must stop the petty jealousies, the violence that we... women have for so long perpetuated on one another” (Weathers, 1970, 305).

Redstockings who popularized the small group “bitch session” process in the 1970s are clear that “consciousness-raising is not ‘therapy,’ which implies the existence of individual solutions” (2000, p. 224). This underlines the fact that, while consciousness-raising practice has historically in some instances been used in liberal ways that focus on individual experiences, the heart of the method/ology is collective and radical.

In the 1970s, based on her own experience of CR, Pamela Allen (2000) described how there was a therapeutic value for women when they opened up and exposed hidden areas within themselves. CR practice generated analysis and enabled women to contextualize their personal
experiences and understand them at the collective or societal level. Allen posited that CR practice is informed by the belief “that theory and analysis not rooted in concrete experience are useless” (Allen, 2000, p. 277). Kathie Sarachild (2000) also reflected on her experiences with the practice, documenting how the analysis was generated collectively using group members’ lived experiences; this was facilitated either by going around the room and asking key questions of one another or by cross examining one person’s experience.

Finally, Vivian Gornick (2000) reflected on her observations of women's participation in CR processes focused on creating a dialogue about “free space” or a world with no oppression.

**Difference and Challenges to Feminist Non-Credit Learning**

I believe that women have a common interest in changing patriarchy and that there is a need for women to support each other in their diverse struggles. The priorities of struggle will vary for women in different specific situations and the women’s movement will always be built from solidarity among many centres of diverse practice. This does not require and is, in fact antithetical, to a project of organizing a monolithic uniform movement. The challenge is for all groups of women to recognize and resist all systems of oppression and understand the connections among their struggles. For without this consciousness no solidarity is possible. With these challenges in mind, I place a particular focus within this investigation on the practice of how feminist educators conceptualize bringing women together and work with women’s experiences in CR informed non-credit learning processes.

I believe that both solidarity and difference need to be addressed; thus, in this dissertation, I navigate the tension of holding both these realities. Differences based on identity
and disparate access to power has historically been a source of tension between women. Considering the ways that tensions around difference come to light in feminist non-credit learning spaces is an important part of understanding what does work in feminist educators’ practices. I will look briefly at feminist learning and organizing processes that are trying to organize all women together and reflect on what have been considered the shortcomings of this approach. I will then examine the ways in which difference in taken up in CR practice.

Second wave feminists believed that in patriarchy all women are oppressed and so can organize together in a common struggle for change when they fully understand their interests. Since the second wave of feminism, postmodern transnational and postcolonial scholars have criticized radical second wave feminists, arguing that their aim of organizing as women in a common struggle against patriarchy required that they overlook/ignore differences among women and reveal a false view of women as a homogeneous group (Kaplan & Grewal, 2002, p. 71).

However, within the second wave there was diversity within the women who practiced CR. This presents a direct challenge to the notion that women (and women of the second wave of feminism) are a homogenous group. For example, the Combahee River Collective was a collective of Black feminists that was “actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as [their] particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking” (Eisenstein, 1978).

As well, many second wave feminists recognized the challenge of working across divisions among feminists. In her 1970s article, “The Relationship of Black Women to the Women’s Movement,” Black feminist Cellestine Ware (2000) pointed out that Black women see
White women as White before kindred women. She went on to state that “if women of both races see their problems as originating in female dependency on men and in their self-contempt, then women will make a revolution in our social and economic order” (2000, pg 111).

This type of shortcoming needed to be addressed through a radical analysis that took on heterosexism, classism and ableism (among others oppressions). As a methodology for group learning, CR did not always result in a radical analysis that also adequately acknowledged and addressed differences between women. I think this was especially true when CR was practiced with groups of differently-located women, as opposed to women who organized based on another common identity (such as race in the case of the Combahee River Collective).

For this reason (among others), it is speculated that interest in CR groups waned and the women’s movement turned in new directions by the late 1970s (Ferree, 1999). Some theorists have argued that this was due to internal disagreements and lack of consensus on issues such as race and strategy (Papachriston, 1976). I would argue that these divisions were linked to the ways that CR was taken up in practice by some groups.

It is true that different groups of women practicing CR took up distinct aspects of patriarchy and exposed new learnings added a great deal to the analysis of the women’s movement as a whole (see Radicalesbians, 2000; Rich, 1986). However, the central drawback of the practice stemmed from the fact that experiences were shared and valued without necessarily adequately considering what or whose experience was shaping the resulting strategies for action. Since CR relied on the experiences of those in the room, in practice the experiences of those not present were neglected (Gordon, 1999, p. 44).

At the same time, I believe that it is possible to generate a radical analysis that goes beyond the direct lived experiences of the women participating; however I believe this is a
difficult endeavour. I will take up the notion of working with experience and its impact on generating a radical analysis throughout this dissertation.

**The Research Context**

This study is situated within metropolitan areas in Ontario. This area encompasses Barrie, Brantford, Greater Sudbury, Guelph, Hamilton Kingston, Kitchener, London, Oshawa, Ottawa-Gatineau, Peterborough, St. Catherine’s - Niagara, Thunder Bay, Toronto and Windsor. As of the 2006 Census, 70 percent of Canadians lived in the country's 33 metropolitan areas, each with a population of 100,000 or more (Statistics Canada, 2006a). The populations in these centres have always had populations representing a wide range of social locations throughout Canada’s history, as infrastructure was developed as a result of First Nations people’s displacement and the labour provided by different waves of immigrant workers was exploited.

These metropolitan areas have continued to grow and the range of different social locations represented have complexified as well. The 2006 Census noted that 43 percent of Toronto’s population was a “visible minority”¹¹ (Statistics Canada, 2006b). These demographics are a result of economic globalization and displacement due to civil and international wars, which have exacerbated the transient nature of many populations and increased the rate of immigration and the number of refugees and undocumented peoples living in each region. The growing population of immigrants, refugees and undocumented peoples compounds the wide variety of identities that have always been represented in Ontario.

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¹¹ I put “visible minority” in quotations because at 43% of the population this is hardly a minority. A term more reflective of the reality is “racialized population.”
This wide variety is reflected in the demographics and complexities of difference within women’s movements and feminist non-credit learning processes. As populations become more diasporic, and differences more nuanced, it becomes more necessary for women to connect across their differing social locations. Given the complexity of identities and differences within Ontario, I recognize the potential for women in these urban settings to strengthen feminist movements by understanding and addressing difference. Researching within metropolitan areas of Ontario provides an opportunity to grapple with the maximum complexity, in the hopes that the lessons generated may be useful to feminist educators working within population centres where the complexity of difference is present, but perhaps not as obvious.

Within the scope of Ontario, I chose to examine the practices of feminist educators who value feminist solidarity and women’s common interests and work with women learners in this context to help them to gain consciousness around their identity and issues of power and oppression, and in particular to integrate issues of intersecting and interlocking oppressions into their understanding. Specifically, I chose to focus on non-credit learning processes for women as sites where the work of understanding and addressing difference may be possible. Within the scope of non-credit learning processes for women, the particular environment is significant. This inquiry is grounded in the understanding that different learning sites or conditions shape what is possible and what approaches will be successful.

My understanding of the importance of context within learning processes is informed by Thiagi, Inc. (1999), a group that spent ten years of fieldwork investigating what makes an effective facilitator. The researchers discovered that facilitators that were rated highly by their peers did not display common behaviours. What made them successful was their ability to vary
their behaviour and approach based on the composition of the group, the activity they were facilitating and the energy of the group, among other factors.

The importance of variable approaches within different contexts is central to this research. I chose to look at a variety of non-credit processes in order to consider how the context shapes the approaches that may be successful. In order to look at these adaptable approaches, I interviewed feminist educators who work to address a wide range of learning goals. The learning goals represented in these learning processes are: 1) personal support, 2) social action, 3) connecting feminisms, 4) consciousness raising and life skills training, 5) spokesperson training, 6) training to run women’s self help groups, and 7) leadership development.

These learning processes were also sponsored in a variety of ways. For example, processes were sponsored either independently by individual educators, by a community group, social service drop-in centre or social service agency focused on women’s issues, or through workplaces, such as unions.

Situating Myself

As a result of my experience as a feminist educator, I have several motives that guide my investigation. This thesis is rooted in my interest in supporting women’s solidarity while understanding and addressing conflict that occurs in groups of differently-located women. Difference does not inevitably lead to conflict. However, I see difference as a major source of conflict in women learning spaces and feminist movements more broadly. I believe that many educators feel ill equipped to respond to conflicts related to difference, and their anxiety inhibits the work of naming and adequately working through oppression and privilege.
I embarked on this exploration for a number of reasons. This inquiry is an effort to increase and deepen my own awareness and strengthen my praxis. I also wished to create a space for feminist educators to learn and share through the research process. More than anything, I was motivated to conduct this research as a means to supply tools and techniques to a wider community of educators, through sharing positive examples where difference and oppression was named and handled effectively.

Of course, I cannot talk about intersectionality without identifying the specific perspective this research emerges from, rooted in my values, experience and consciousness. I approach this study as a politically progressive, White, middle-class, non-practicing Christian, English-speaking, educated, Canadian born, third-generation immigrant/seventh-generation Canadian, heterosexual, single, childless, able-bodied woman. These locations of privilege and oppression frame the research process for me. I experience and understand gendered oppression as a woman. As a White, middle-class, non-religious Christian, heterosexual, able-bodied woman, I occupy locations of privilege that create understandings that are hegemonic and partial. I will return to how my own intersectional experiences influence my work of knowledge construction throughout this thesis.

**Contributions of This Research**

This inquiry provides a general discussion that highlights feminist educators' practices within a variety of contexts and learning goals, as well as focusing on particular learning processes in two case studies. Case studies were used to examine how each context shapes the limitations and successes of pedagogical practices for integrating issues of intersecting and interlocking oppressions into learners’ understanding. Based on previous research by Thiagi, Inc.
(1999), I anticipate that what is deemed successful and what is found to be effective will be
different depending on the context. As a result, the intention of this investigation is not to arrive
at findings that will be generalizable or lead to the creation of any absolute rules of practice.
Instead, the goal of this inquiry is to examine and understand how the specificity of each non-
credit context shapes the variable approaches that may be successful when working with groups
of women for consciousness-raising.

Most immediately, this research makes a contribution by strengthening the praxis of the women who participated in the researching process. Feminist educators facilitating non-credit processes have many demands on them and rarely have time to reflect, which is key in cultivating a self-reflexive practice and appreciating one’s own successes. Additionally, they do not always have occasion to engage in dialogue with other women doing similar work. Through the focus groups’ dialogues, the participating educators also benefitted from networking and creating connections with other feminist educators as they discussed their work together.

In practice, it is my hope that the wider community of feminist educators will benefit from reflecting on non-credit feminist learning practices and building on these successes in their own practices. It is my hope that insights resulting from this inquiry will assist feminist educators in considering how the specificity of their contexts informs their pedagogical choices, as well as provoke their critical thinking about how different pedagogical and learning practices could be adapted to their contexts. My goals are to show how feminist educators attend to and raise consciousness around difference and women’s intersecting social locations while valuing solidarity and to share their successful practices with other educators. These goals will be achieved through this thesis and through the production of a more popular text, a practical tool to which feminist educators in the field may refer.
Within feminist theorizing, this research will also make an important contribution in its cohesive documentation of a range of feminist non-credit learning practices. This work investigates the challenges involved in different non-credit learning processes, where through the process of learning women are called to explore and address the power dynamics associated with their interlocking and intersecting social locations. Shedding light on difference in all of its complexity in feminist non-credit learning processes is of particular importance in light of criticism that charges much feminist theory with propagating Eurocentric, middle-class values that negate and disregard the experiences of so many women (see Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000, 1994, 1991; Razack, 1989; Ware, 2000).

By connecting the theory and practice in an exploration of the ways in which non-credit feminist learning practices deal with issues of differences among women, this investigation will play an important role for feminist educators and scholars alike. Within adult education, this research will highlight women’s role in adult education and underline the strength of feminist non-credit pedagogies. The interdisciplinary nature of this study will encourage scholars and adult education practitioners to recognize and value the interlinking tenets within feminism and adult education practices.

**Overview of Chapters**

**Chapter Two**

This Chapter outlines the epistemologies, methodologies and theories that inform this research, which include feminist-informed research, specifically Nancy Hartsock’s, Patricia Hill-Collin’s and Chela Sandoval’s approaches to feminist standpoint. The frameworks of feminist intersectionality and interlocking oppressions are also discussed in terms of how these shape my
research approach. Finally, the methodologies of Critical Appreciative Process and Case Study are discussed in terms of their relevance.

*Chapter Three*

Chapter Three describes the methods of recruitment, sampling, and data collection through interviews and focus groups. This Chapter also details the approaches to data analysis used. Chapter Three introduces and outlines the learning goals and context of the sponsoring agencies of the feminist educators learning processes.

*Chapter Four*

Chapter Four begins the description of the research findings. Chapter Four discusses challenges and barriers that feminist educators indicated get in the way, or prevent, women learners from gaining a consciousness around their identity and issues of power and oppression.

*Chapter Five*

Chapter Five describes learning and pedagogical practices feminist educators feel help women learners to gain a consciousness around their identity and issues of power and oppression within the context of women’s shared interests. I also discuss the ways these learning and pedagogical practices resonate with the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and interlocking oppressions.
Chapter Six

In this Chapter, I provide a more in-depth analysis of successful feminist non-formal learning practices in two contexts, using a Case Study approach.

Chapter Seven

In Chapter Seven, I expand on the findings, recommending additional pedagogies and practices that feminist educators could use to aid women learners in gaining consciousness around their identities and issues of power and oppression.

Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight provides a summary of the major themes emerging from this study. This Chapter outlines limitations of the study and provides recommendations for future research directions within the themes discussed.
CHAPTER TWO:  
RESEARCH APPROACHES, EPISTEMOLOGIES AND THEORIES

Introduction

Because this is an interdisciplinary study, I drew on a variety of theories and literature to guide this investigation, and there are several epistemologies that strongly informed my methodological approach. My methodology is influenced by the concept of the *bricoleur*, which is a French word that has come to denote someone who creates things with his or her hands in “crafty” ways. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966) describes the *bricoleur* as one who uses pre-existing provisions that are readily accessible and assembles them in new ways. In this way, my methodology is a *bricolage*, or a pieced-together methodology, “drawing on whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand” (Becker in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4).

Research Epistemologies

This inquiry into feminist learning practices was strongly rooted in feminist epistemologies. Epistemology is “a theory of knowledge embedded is a theoretical perspective” (Creswell, 2003, p. 4) that “addresses how knowledge is created... and (lays) the foundation for the knowledge building process” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p.12). In this research, I was guided by feminist epistemologies and ways of knowing in my analysis of feminist educators’ pedagogies and learning practices.
Several epistemological frameworks informed the ways I approached knowledge construction through this research process, specifically anti-oppression and feminist informed frameworks. Within a feminist informed approach, I am working with feminist standpoint theory and the frameworks of intersectionality and interlocking identities.

**Anti-Oppression**

“Anti-oppression” refers to a critical orientation to research that centres on difference and that “considers the socio-political realities and oppressions that individuals and collectivities experience on the basis of their ‘multiple differences’ from the White, male, heterosexual able bodied norm” (Moosa-Mitha, 2005).

I am invested in anti-oppression as a means to address the normalizing processes that devalue so many social locations and groups in society. An anti-oppression approach is an active stance against these marginalizing hegemonies that affect everyone, although differentially.

**Feminist Informed**

The central orientation of my research is feminist informed. The aim of this research was not just to research about women, but to produce research for women, that “does not merely generate new knowledge about women for the sake of knowledge, but conducts research with the purpose of empowering women” (Langellier & Hall, 1989, p. 195). It is my hope that this inquiry produced knowledge that will assist other feminist educators in applying learning practices that raise learners’ awareness of their social
locations in ways that connect with an intersectional understanding. This approach is a specific means of employing an anti-oppression framework and valuing multiple differences in order to resist hegemony that dictates who can be a knower and what is considered valuable knowledge.

Given the criticism mentioned in Chapter One that much feminist theory inadequately resists reproducing Eurocentric, middle-class values that contradict and discount the experiences of so many women, these issues influence my definition of feminist informed research. Through a difference-centred feminist approach, this research aimed to keep a complexified view of identity and subjectivity at the foreground. These complexities of identity informed each stage of the research process while guiding my exploration of the practices of differently-located feminist educators.

In order to construct knowledge that promotes understanding for feminist educators, this research was conducted using a transformative cognitive approach, which endorses women’s subjectivity and women’s agency to act for themselves (Eichler, 1997; Smith, 1987). Indeed, I approached the research from the viewpoint that the research participants are the experts and that they have the tools to empower themselves in their lived realities and the contexts in which they facilitate. Furthermore, I let the research participants shape the dialogue and name the challenges and successes experienced in their learning practices when I spoke with them. When analysing the transcripts of our discussions, I centred on the educators’ words and experiences in relation to their individual contexts. In this manner, this dissertation considered women’s situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991) and is grounded in the values of the women educators who took part through their exploration of “the actualities of (their) lives as (they) live them in
the local particularities of the everyday/every night worlds in which (their) body anchors (them)” (Smith, 2005b, p. 264).

This inquiry was guided by approaches that value differently-located women’s situated knowledges. In order to reflect the complexity of these knowledges, I drew on feminist thought that acknowledges and seeks to address the involvedness of identity and differences between women. Within feminist informed thought I am working with feminist standpoint theory and the frameworks of intersectionality and interlocking identities, which each provided a valuable lens for examining learning practices in non-credit contexts with differently-located women.

**Feminist Standpoint Theory**

Feminist standpoint theory is a central epistemological approach within this project. I take from the work of several theorists, including Nancy Hartsock, Patricia Hill-Collins and Chela Sandoval, who each theorized an approach that values the contributions that differently-located women make to shared knowledge construction.

Hartsock (1983, 1998) understands subjectivity as an ongoing, dynamic process that “requires an always contingent and fragile reconstruction/transformation of complex subject positions” (p. 245). These important perspectives assisted me with my understanding that the research participants’ awareness (as feminist educators and beyond) as well as mine (as a researcher and beyond) was not static, but were being (re)created throughout the research process. This outlook encouraged me to share my subject position with the educators and guided my interpretations of the stories they
related to me. I drew on feminist standpoint theory as a lens to take into account the struggle inherent in raising one’s consciousness, since it was apparent that the feminist educators became more aware of themselves and their practices as they engaged in the research process.

In her articulation of feminist standpoint, Hartsock conceptualizes that the actual existing social relations among human beings are inhuman and that we must all work to achieve a standpoint to expose this harshness and create a project for change. Hartsock argues that a woman’s social locations or the oppressions that she faces as a woman (among other social locations) within hegemonic systems of domination may not inherently provide her with a critical understanding of the world. Hartsock feels that women must struggle to achieve an understanding of the world, regardless of the social locations or subject positions they occupy (1983, p. 107). Indeed, she states that “the vision available to the oppressed group must be struggled for and represents an achievement” (1983, p. 37). Hartsock also asserts that “the vision available to the rulers will be both partial and perverse” (1983, p. 37). This approach to feminist standpoint underlines the value of marginalized voices in creating shared knowledge to promote anti-oppression.

The work of Hill-Collins also centres on the experiences of marginalized women. Her work helps to contextualize specific oppressions within the macro context of systemic oppression based on gender, race, class, sexual orientation, ability and additional social locations, which are central to this research. She theorizes a concept called the matrix of domination, which is a way to map oppressions that can be used to show “social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and
are contained” (2000, p. 227). This matrix demonstrates how oppression is socially organized and traces how knowledge construction influences empowerment. It also illustrates the social organization and institutionalization of oppression. For example, the matrix can be used to trace the ways in which schools (or educational processes) are sites that (re)produce oppression, based on the intersecting identities of the individuals participating in these institutions. Such marginalization in educational settings based on race has been well documented elsewhere (Apple & Beane, 1995; Giroux, 2009; Razack, 1998). Hill-Collins also points out that the matrix of domination will vary from context to context and is historically specific while also showing “how domination and oppression is structured across time, within any context” (2000, p. 228).

Within this research, this matrix assisted in pointing to ways to address and attend to oppression. It highlighted how both learning practices and research may be spaces where oppression takes shape and is (re)institutionalized. It also demonstrated the importance of recognizing and addressing the specificity of oppressions that existed in the range of contexts within this research, and of understanding the different entry points represented by the feminist educators participating in this study.

Hartsock’s standpoint approach calls for valuing suppressed knowledges and looks to foster a critical understanding of the world from the viewpoint of non-hegemonic perspectives (1983, p. 37). Hill-Collins (2004) also argues that marginality produces valuable knowledge. In particular, her work focuses on the unique perspective of Black women (even while there are differences among Black women, based on factors such as class). She argues that Black women’s unique subjectivity enables them a specific potential for developing a feminist standpoint. Sandoval (2000) supports this view,
arguing for an appreciation of the oppositional consciousness and the strategic position of women of colour in achieving a feminist standpoint. She feels that a feminist standpoint is a goal to be achieved together, with those of different subjectivities adding to one another’s understandings.

Hartsock, Hill-Collins & Sandoval’s perspectives have informed this research in terms of how I conceptualized and valued differently-located women’s ways of knowing through their multiple subjugated perspectives. Throughout the data collection and analysis stages, I valued differently-located women's participation and privileged non-hegemonic subjectivities and marginalized perspectives in creating knowledge together.

However, I go beyond these definitions of a feminist standpoint, which consider the basis of critical consciousness as being solely about struggling to achieve an understanding of the world based on the experience of being oppressed as women. In addition to oppression, I consider achieving a feminist standpoint to include the critical consciousness that emerges from women’s efforts to understand their identities of privilege.

**Intersectionality**

My approach is informed by the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality recognizes the specificity and multiplicity of differently-located women’s social locations. As mentioned previously, Kimberle Williams Crenshaw (1989) first articulated this theory in order to address the complicated and compounding nature of oppression.
rooted in race and gender. To do this, she coined the term “intersectionality,” drawing on the image of an intersection.

Leslie McCall (2005) also conceptualized three different ways to study intersectionality. These include anticategorical complexity, which takes on deconstructing categorical divisions and intercategorical complexity, an approach that starts from addressing inequalities within society. The third approach, intracategorical difference, is the most useful lens. Looking at intracategorical difference enables a complexified understanding to differentiate within different identity groups. As Crenshaw reflects, “the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite – that it frequently conflates or ignores intra-group differences… ignoring differences within groups contributes to tension among groups” (1995, p. 357). Intracategorical complexity seeks to highlight the diversity of women's experiences, even amongst women who share similar facets of identity. Intracategorical complexity looks at various identity categories and at the neglected points of intersection “in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups” (McCall, 2005, p. 1774).

While the term “intersectionality” (and all its resultant approaches) has gained the most currency in academic thought, Kathy Davis (2008) noted that, “controversies have emerged about whether intersectionality should be conceptualized as a crossroad (Crenshaw, 1991), as an “axes” of difference (Yuval-Davis, 2006) or as a dynamic process (Staunae, 2003)” (p. 68).

Crenshaw’s intersectionality recognized that a woman of colour’s oppression through the legal system was compounded, and that there was no language to express
this. Her notion of intersectionality was born in response to the compartmentalization of identity within the law (and other realms), making it possible to be considered a woman or a person of colour, but not both simultaneously. Crenshaw saw that, “although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices” (1995, p. 357). As a result of its promise to take on multiple aspects of identity and oppression, intersectionality has been called “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far” (McCall, 2005, p. 1771).

Some theorists have expanded on this conceptualization of intersectionality. Edwina Barvosa (2008) notes that intersectionality could have three distinct modes:

The first mode is the one emphasized by Crenshaw and Collins in which multiple identities and social relations produce compound or additive meanings or influence on individual experience, group relations, or social outcomes. The second moment is one in which multiple social identities generate alternative or cross-cutting meaning or influence […] The third mode of constructive effects of intersectionality occurs when social identities and relations are overlapping in their content such that they share group specific meanings, values, or practices (p. 78).

Barvosa also observed that intersectionality could be thought of as an internal process, which would include “the association between identity schemes we inherit and internalize in various social spheres and those associations or overlaps we may craft for ourselves” (2008, p. 79). This highlights the need to understand one’s intersectionality as emerging from subjective processes.

This subjective aspect may account for why many theorists have raised questions about intersectionality. In general, intersectionality has been critiqued for being vague in its definition and having questionable empirical validity (Nash, 2008). Its methodology
has also been questioned in terms of whether it is “a theory… a concept or heuristic device… [or] a reading strategy for doing feminist analysis” (Davis, 2008, p. 68). The potential scope of intersectionality has also created controversy. As Davis (2008) asserts, “It is not at all clear whether intersectionality should be limited to understanding individual experiences, to theorizing identity, or whether it should be taken as a property of social structures and cultural discourses” (p. 68).

There is also a lack of clarity among intersectionality scholars about whether intersectionality is a theory that focuses on marginality or is meant as a general theory of identity. The majority of intersectional theory has focused on marginalized subjects (Ferguson, 2000). This is because “a focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination” (Crenshaw 1989, p. 140).

This focus on marginalized subjects resonates with Sandoval’s (2000) take on feminist standpoint theory, which regards those with marginalized social locations as having a greater potential for epistemic advantage. However, intersectionality has also been critiqued for narrowing this focus to become one of race through making “use of Black women as its ideal subject” (Nash, 2008). I would argue that a primary focus on race may be built into intersectionality theory, as it “emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s from critical race studies” (Nash, 2008).

I believe, as Kathy Davis (2008) argues, that the ambiguity and open-endedness of intersectionality, which “beg[s] for further critique and elaboration” (p. 70), is precisely what makes it a good feminist theory. Through the focus on intersectionality’s
multiple axes of identity it is implied that the concept could be applied to other aspects of marginalization.

In this regard I agree with Zack (2005) who argues that women are inherently marginalized and therefore a natural subject of intersectionality theory. However, I take up intersectionality as a means to look at all intersecting social locations, not only those associated with marginality. As mentioned, I believe that women of all social locations can achieve a feminist standpoint, based on her marginalities and her privileged social locations. Together each woman’s experience adds to a collective feminist standpoint, which I see as the ultimate goal for building feminist movements. Furthermore, I do not want to promote a “race towards innocence” and so take up privileged and oppressed aspects of identity in how I conceptualize intersectionality and in turn subjectivity.

Through attention to intra-group complexities and tensions, this research highlights perspectives on difference that are commonly overlooked within non-credit contexts. In the recruitment of the feminist educators who participated in this research, as well as in the way I approached our dialogue during the data collection phase, I considered the complex differences among women. For example, I ensured that one form of oppression did not become the primary focus within the research, and I did not assume that similarly identifying women had similar subjectivities while interpreting the data. The framework of intracategorical complexity was also useful as a guide to ensure that data collection and analysis focusing on any single feminist educator was conducted in ways that highlighted the range of experiences within different components of her social locations.
Within this research, intersectionality is a way to conceptualize how oppressions are socially constructed and affect different bodies in distinct ways. This perspective provided a means to conceptualize and value the complexity of ways of knowing that research participants drew on as a result of the oppressions they experience in their everyday lives. This variety of lenses was then reflected in the stories they shared about their work. I sought to portray and (re)present this sophistication in as nuanced a manner as possible in this exploration. Additionally, the complexity of the intersections added to the knowledge produced in this research process.

**Interlocking Identities**

The concept of interlocking identities also made an important contribution to this work. This work employed the concept of interlocking oppressions, which shows how different social locations and oppressions are constructed through interactions with other people. This contrasts with and compliments the intersectionality framework, which is concerned with how identities or social locations are configured independently, within oneself. Sherene Razack & Louis Fellows (1998) define interlocking oppression as the ways in which systems of oppressions come into existence in and through one another. By this logic, class exploitation could not be accomplished without gender and racial hierarchies, or imperialism could not function without class exploitation, sexism, heterosexism, and so on (p. 1). Interlocking oppression accounts for how awareness of race, class, gender (as well as other social locations) co-constitute one another in ways that cannot be separated in White supremacist capitalist patriarchy (Razack & Fellows, 1998, p. 3). Interlocking oppression conceptualizes the intricacy of social locations in
relation to one another and the process of how one’s identity is constructed against those of Others. Throughout the research process, I considered how interlocking oppression may relate to the ways in which the feminist educators understand their own social locations, as well as the ways in which they conducted their consciousness-raising practices with women learners.

In practice, an interlocking analysis suggests that we need to understand and confront our complicity in one another’s oppressions in order to move towards a practice of collectively uncovering the interaction between systems of oppression (such as sexism, racism, and classism). In other words, we must face the ways we downplay our participation in oppressing others and “race to innocence” (Razack, 1998, p. 14; Razack and Fellows, 1998), and instead be accountable for how our power and privilege is exercised.

The notion of co-construction points out how privilege and marginalization are created through processes, such as facilitated learning and research, and highlights the need for both the feminist educators and myself as the researcher to attend to this dynamic in our respective contexts.

*The Relationship between Intersectionality and Interlocking Oppressions*

Intersectionality and interlocking oppressions, which are connected, yet distinct, are key ideas. Intersectionality elaborates on the way the social locations of individuals have multiple axes, which form their complex subjectivities. Intersectionality understands that aspects of identity do not function independently and must be understood as
connected and socially constructed. This concept focuses on the configuration of social locations without considering how the interaction between individuals affects one’s subjectivity.

Interlocking oppressions takes this idea a step further and names the mechanisms of social construction more concretely. The concept interlocking oppressions considers how interactions between individuals shape their subjectivities. Specifically, interlocking oppressions names how one person’s aspects of privilege can construct another’s marginalized identity. In this way, the concept of interlocking oppressions explains how the oppressions associated with different social locations are socially constructed, as well as calling on individuals to take responsibility for their role in the oppression of others.

Within this thesis I use intersectionality and interlocking oppressions as complementary theories that each nuance how social locations of oppression can be understood and addressed. I believe that there is a progression between grasping the concepts of intersectionality and interlocking oppressions. As I see it, learners need to incorporate an awareness of multiple social locations and consciousnesses (which resonates with an intersectionality framework) into their ways of knowing before they are able to come to understand how differently-located women’s experiences are co-constituted (or interlocking).
As seen in Figure 1. (Level of challenge to learners based on how identity is taken up), learners increase the complexity of their analysis, moving from an understanding that echoes the ideas of intersectionality theory to a more complexified understanding of how their identity is co-constituted with and through interaction with others, as in the theory of interlocking oppressions. As depicted, the more complex or multifaceted the analysis is, the more difficult it will be for learners to fully incorporate these ways of knowing and apply them to their lives.
Research Approaches

In the section that follows, I will discuss the approaches to making meaning that were used within this research. This bricolage utilizes the Critical Appreciative Process as an orientation to all stages of the research, but primarily throughout the data collection process. For analysing the data, I utilized questions to guide the data analysis, and then interpreted the data for the ways in which it shed light on these questions. I then used the Case Study method to focus on two case studies as a means to further illustrate the points raised in the general discussion of findings.

Critical Appreciative Process

Feminists have recognized that women are divided by class and race, among other social locations, and a number have documented examples of feminist practices that reproduce rather than bridge these differences. My goal in this research was to work from an understanding of historically-based marginalization, but also to focus on what does work in facilitating differently-located women to gain an understanding of their social locations and impact on others as they work to understand their common interests. To do this, I utilized the Critical Appreciative Process (CAP) in order to explore what is working within feminist non-credit learning processes as they currently exist.

The CAP approach builds on the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) method. AI is a research methodology that focuses on positive attributes, such as what is working or what strengths exist, and is used for organizational and community change (Madruger-Watkins
Mohr, 2001). Instead of concentrating on deficiencies, or what changes need to be made for improvement, AI intentionally centres on positive achievements and existing skills and strengths in order to fuel movement in the direction of positive change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000). However, AI may focus on and emphasize the positive at the risk of ignoring everything else, in the way a plant may grow lopsided as it reaches for the light as Rogers and Fraser (2004) have posited.

The CAP is a more critical examination than AI because it acknowledges the weaknesses, challenges and contradictions within an AI approach. The CAP approach has been postulated as a means to bring AI and critical theory together in order to recognize the involvedness of human behaviour (Grant & Humphries, 2006). I incorporated the CAP into my work as a way of focusing on the positives while still maintaining a critical understanding within the research focus in order to learn what does work.

As I applied the CAP to my research process, it was a challenge to maintain the balance between criticism and appreciation. Articulating the research focus and interview questions with this balance in mind was straightforward. Throughout the data collection stage, however, I consistently had to refocus the feminist educators towards what was working in their practices, as their tendency was to elaborate on the challenges associated with the work. Due to the responses I received, I chose to represent the data in three different sections. I began with a discussion of the challenges and barriers associated with raising women learners’ consciousness around issues that divided them (discussed in Chapter Four). This then created the context for the feminist educators' stories about what practices were working to help women become more aware of differences and create spaces to promote understanding and work together (see Chapter Five). Finally, given the
challenge of focusing on what is working, I drew on my own experiences as a feminist educator to further analyze the data for implicit suggestions and indicators of successful feminist non-credit learning practices (see Chapter Six).

**Question to Guide Data Analysis**

I was directed by my research epistemologies when collecting and analysing the research data and used a set of questions when analysing the transcripts. These questions guided the data analysis and are distinct from my research questions (which are outlined in Chapter One) and the interview and focus group questions (which are outlined in Chapter Three). The questions that guided my data analysis are:

**Overarching Question to Guide Data Analysis**

Before academics theorized the concepts and coined the phrase, the ideas behind intersectionality and interlocking identities came out of a need raised by communities. In analysing this data, these questions are: How are the concepts of intersectionality and interlocking identities being taken up by communities now? Which aspects of intersectionality and interlocking identities are relevant?

**Specific Questions to Guide Data Analysis**

1. How do the concepts of intersecting and interlocking identities make sense to feminist educators?

2. How do the concepts of intersectionality and interlocking identities resonate within feminist non-credit learning processes?
These questions acted as a tool or lens through which to look at the data and uncover meaning. This method was used in order to tell a story about successful feminist non-credit learning practices, outlined in the general discussion.

**Case Study Approach**

After recording my initial analysis of the data, I determined that a more thorough discussion of the findings was necessary. I chose to use the Case Study approach as an emergent component of my research design, and to focus on two of the feminist non-credit learning contexts.

For many respondents, it was difficult to name practices that adequately assist women learners in becoming conscious and able to work across differences and intersectionalities; therefore, data from each of the feminist educators' contexts was not equally compelling in terms of how it illuminated the research question. As well, I could not convey the complexity of each of the learning processes and do them justice. The potential breadth of information coming from each of these contexts would have made the dissertation fragmented. Given these challenges, it made sense to focus on the specificities and complexities of two learning processes that demonstrated practices that were innovative and successful within their context.

The two Case Studies I focus on in this dissertation are used to tell stories that build theory rather than to test theory (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991; Woodside & Wilson, 2004). A case study refers to “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single
phenomenon or social unit” (Merriam, 1988, p. 21). As Yin (1994) states, a case study is also considered a research process, which he describes as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear” (p. 13). Case studies are commonly used in educational research, and they generally focus on unique people or programs (Herreid, 2005; Stake, 1995). Through the use of case studies, this inquiry recognizes multiple realities, which may or may not converge, through acknowledging the points of view of myself as the researcher and the feminist educators with whom I spoke (Yin, 1994).

In this inquiry, I provided a general discussion of the findings within eleven learning processes facilitated by feminist educators. I then narrowed the focus and conducted a more detailed case study analysis of the positive attributes of two of the learning processes. I chose to highlight two cases to strengthen the findings, as multiple-case studies are considered “more compelling, and the overall study is therefore more robust” (Yin, 1984, p. 48)

I chose case studies in order to provide rich detail that enables both the feminist educator’s context and practices to come alive. It is my hope that, through this depiction, this dissertation avoids the possibility of resembling the dry, bland reports that miss out on portraying the provocative practices of feminist educators to which Walters and Manicom (1996) refer in their work. Instead, the two case studies “illuminate a… set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result” (Schramm in Yin, 1984 p. 22-23).
CHAPTER THREE:  
THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Introduction

In the following chapter, I outline the process I used to collect data in this dissertation. There were 10 feminist educators participating in this research. I began recruitment in July 2007, began sampling and conducting screening calls in January 2008, had the first interview in February 2008, recruited and sampled the final participants in April 2009 and completed data collection in May 2010.

In this chapter, I discuss the ways I went about recruiting and choosing feminist educators to participate in this investigation and details about them and the contexts they facilitate. I will also outline how I collected the data through interviews and focus groups and kept a journal of observations and reflections as the process unfolded. Finally, this chapter describes the ways in which these data sources were analysed to construct meaning.

Participant Recruitment

Participant Recruitment Method

I recruited participants for my research by soliciting referrals and opinions from fellow feminists, educators and feminist educators. I asked referees to refer research participants primarily through email, although in some cases, where the opportunity presented itself, I sought referrals in person, following up with an email stating the recruitment criteria (see Appendix A: Email Requesting Referrals for Feminist Educators). The method of recruitment through referral was utilized as a means to ensure
that research participants would be those who were knowledgeable and well respected in the field, as opposed to soliciting participants through an open call, which could draw in feminist educators of varying skills levels. I asked my various contacts to provide me with the email addresses of feminist educators who could be potential participants, and then I directly contacted the educators to seek their participation in my study. In a few cases, referees preferred to get approval from the feminist educators before sharing their email addresses with me.

**Participant Criteria**

I had four criteria for the feminist educators. In the list that follows, I describe each one and discuss my rationale. I recruited individuals who:

1. **Are considered by their peers to be successful in planning and facilitating feminist non-credit learning processes.**

   As mentioned above, feminist educators were recommended by referees knowledgeable in the areas of feminist non-credit education, popular/adult education or feminist organizing. I chose to rely on peer assessment in order to find research participants who were perceived to be using innovative and successful processes. As a result, I relied in part on the referees’ assessment of what was successful in order to account for the variety of ways feminist non-credit learning processes may take shape.
2. *Have designed and facilitated a non-credit learning process in an urban centre of Ontario for/with at least two groups of women in the last ten years.*

I wanted to speak with feminist educators who had facilitated their processes fairly recently (within the last ten, but preferably five years) to ensure that they would remember what had taken place. Based on the understanding that what works with one group will need to be altered with a different group in a different context (see discussion of Thiagi Inc.’s research in Chapter One), I asked that potential participants had led at least two processes, so that their impressions of what practices work in raising consciousness would not be generalized from just one experience. I believe that working with multiple groups requires an educator to experiment with varying approaches, which results in a greater ability to discern what works with different groups and in different contexts.

3. *Work from a feminist perspective to develop women participants’ feminist consciousness, solidarity among differently-located women and social action through non-credit learning processes.*

As mentioned in Chapter One, I chose a purposefully encompassing definition of feminist in order to connect with a wide variety of educators. In recruiting, I considered the word “feminist” to refer to a woman who acknowledges patriarchy and the ways in which it operates and who works to address this oppression through social movements (as opposed to promoting the individual interests of some women).\(^{12}\)

\(^{12}\) As described earlier when speaking with participants and analyzing the data I considered how educators worked with multiple oppressions, and not strictly how they addressed patriarchy.
I asked that educators come from a feminist perspective, and I was open to a variety of interpretations or orientations to feminism. At the same time I did screen out those with liberal interpretation of feminism, or ones that promoted the individual interests of (some) women. In the recruitment emails I further specified that feminist learning processes could be connected to any content/subject area; the important thing is that they promote analysis of patriarchy and oppression. Participants did not have to use language such as “feminism” or “patriarchy,” as long as they work from an aligned perspective (personal correspondence, July 2007 to April 2009).

I also looked for feminist educators who value solidarity among differently-located women. I did this because, while I did not investigate what practices they used to develop solidarity, it was important to me that this be the context within which differences in identity, experience and power were taken up through the learning processes they facilitated.

4. Represent diverse social locations

I specified that research participants represent different social locations as a means to have maximum variation amongst the feminist educators who participated. I intentionally used the term “diverse,” even though it is problematic in the way it deploys a discourse of multiculturalism, which is often an empty celebration of cultural traditions (such as food and traditional dress) that erases political differences. Despite this drawback, I chose to use the term because it is more familiar to a greater number of people than the term “differently-located.” The range of social locations was assessed according to how research participants self identified. As discussed previously, the
participation of women of different social locations was important to the research because it provided a way to value suppressed and marginalized knowledges, which is important when working towards achieving a feminist standpoint, (as Hill-Collins (2000) and Sandoval (2000) discuss. In requesting referees to think about referring those with “diverse social locations,” I was suggesting that they would think beyond the “usual suspects.” It was important to make this request because the referees’ suggestions tended towards homogeneity, and the participation of differently-located feminist educators was critical to construct distinct situated knowledges and perspectives. These different perspectives would in turn shed more light on the research questions.

**Participant Sampling Method**

In this research, I used a mix of methods. I used convenience sampling (Hesse-Biber, 2006, p. 71) when I called on the recommendations of my colleagues. I also used maximum variation sampling (Hesse-Biber, 2006, p. 71) in terms of age, ability, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, socio-economic status, citizenship status, sexual orientation, educational level, goals of the learning process and co-facilitated vs. solo-facilitated processes. I did not imagine that one woman would be speaking for or representing all women of a certain class, race, age group, etc.; however, as discussed previously, it was important to have differently-located feminist educators participating in the research for the non-hegemonic perspectives they would contribute. I also aimed to achieve maximum variation in the learning goals and types of sponsorship of the participating feminist educators.
In this research, I coded my data for meaning and allowed my analysis to drive where I looked for more data. This is known as theoretical sampling, which meant that I “decide[d] who or what to sample next, based on prior data gathered from the same research project” (Hesse-Biber, 2006, p. 72). Through this method, I used a rolling process of recruitment and sampling in order to ensure maximum variation as the research process progressed.

**Participant Recruitment and Sampling Process**

Recruitment, sampling and participant interviews took place simultaneously over the period of July 2007 to February 2009. As a result of challenges that arose during the recruitment period, I altered my recruitment strategy in order to achieve maximum variation in the participants taking part.

**Details of Initial Recruitment and Sampling Process**

I used my initial recruitment and sampling process from July 2007 to August 2008 (see *Figure 2. Initial recruitment and sampling process*). This process followed specific steps with each potential participant. The overall process was non-linear or laddered, however, in the sense that potential participants were in varying stages of the process at any given time. This method was chosen to expedite the data collection process as opposed to receiving all recommendations for potential participants, then sending the recruitment email to all those who were appropriate, and so on for each step in the process.
In this method, I solicited recommendations through my network of contacts for potential feminist educators to take part in the research and I received referrals from 24 people.

Once I had received suggestions from my referees, I contacted the feminist educators through email to let them know they had been recommended to participate in the research. In these emails, I told them that a peer had referred them to me, and I shared the criteria and commitment required. I also invited them to ask questions about the research, and to set up a screening call if they were potentially interested. I followed up with the majority who met the criteria (see Appendix B: Request to Participate in Feminist Learning Research Email). I communicated with potential participants directly through email in order to establish a relationship and answer any questions. Also, I did not want the recruitment email to be forwarded on and circulated widely to those who were not recommended by peers. I offered to set up a brief phone call to provide more details including the sampling procedure and its importance to the research findings, to ensure that they met the criteria, and so that we could begin to develop a relationship (see Appendix C: Screening Call Script). During the screening phone call, I spoke with the feminist educators about the breadth of their experience facilitating non-credit learning processes for women, and then, if it seemed probable that they would be interested in participating, we began narrowing down to the learning processes they had facilitated that would be most relevant during the interview stage.

For ease of reading I have referred to the Request to Participate in Feminist Learning Research email as the “recruitment email” throughout the text.
This chart reflects the process conducted with each potential participant, but does not capture the non-linear nature of the overall research process, as potential participants were at varying stages of the process at any given time.
Challenges Encountered During Initial Recruitment and Selection Process

Initially, I intended to sample participants once all of the screening conversations had taken place. In reality, the recruitment process took quite a long time, and it made sense to perform rolling recruitment and sampling processes while I began the initial interviews. The research process was not a linear progression, and the steps of recruitment, sampling, and interviewing were conducted at the same time, with a great deal of overlap between steps. As described previously, the recruitment and sampling processes used a theoretical sampling procedure in order to ensure that a range of experiences and social locations were represented within both the feminist educators’ social locations and the contexts in which they facilitated. Once I had identified a suitable participant within certain categories, I had to turn down subsequent referrals that also would have made excellent participants.

There were several other challenges associated with trying to recruit differently-located feminist educators. Regardless of the social locations of the referees, the initial recommendations I received produced a fairly homogenous list of potential participants, most of whom were White, older, straight, middle class, educated, and published in fields related to this inquiry. These social locations reflected hegemonic constructions of feminism, which I wished to avoid. Upon reflection, I believe that this homogeneity stemmed from the referees’ conception of feminism, as well as whom they thought would self identify as feminist and who they felt I would consider to be an ideal feminist participant for this research. The hegemonic ideals reflected in the referrals also show biases in terms of who is deemed credible to speak with authority on a subject. For example, women with social locations of privilege, such as being White, educated and
middle class are seen as authoritative and have greater social capital that enables them to gain this credibility. Finally, the homogenous social locations of the referred educators mirror many of my own social locations – White, middle class, educated and able bodied. While I attempted to draw on a range of contacts to be referees, I may not have had access to as many different communities as would have been useful in this process.

Eventually, my sampling strategy allowed me to locate participants who provided me with maximum variation in race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class. However, I had received no fruitful leads for younger women, women who had experienced homelessness or worked with women who experience homelessness or women of First Nation/Métis heritage, all of whom I felt would illuminate important points of review in relation to the subject under investigation. While I did receive referrals for women living with (dis)abilities, these women were not able to participate at the time I contacted them. All referrals for younger educators (under 40 years old) resulted in contact with young women who facilitated processes for girls or youth. And through the initial process, I had received no leads for women of First Nation/Métis heritage or women with experiences of homelessness. As a result, I adapted my approach to a more targeted method of recruitment and sampling as the research process progressed.

Targeted Recruitment and Sampling Process

Due to the importance of having maximum variation amongst participants, I began a more targeted recruitment process from September 2008 to February 2009 (see Figure 3. Targeted recruitment and sampling process). In the targeted recruitment process, I focused on certain social locations and contexts in order to include different
facets of social locations that were not yet present in the sample (see Appendix D: Email Requesting Targeted Referrals for Feminist Educators of Specific Social locations).

As mentioned, the focused recruitment sought out women of First Nations/Métis heritage, women living with (dis)abilities, younger feminist educators, women who were not university-educated, and women who had experienced homelessness or worked with women who experience homelessness.

**Figure 3. Targeted recruitment and sampling process.**

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15 This chart reflects the process conducted with each potential participant, but does not capture the non-linear nature of the overall research process, as potential participant were at varying stages of the process at any given time.
Targeted recruitment was conducted in two ways: 1) by directly emailing individuals whom I knew (either by personal experience or through internet research) of particular social locations or 2) by contacting individuals or organizations that had connections with the specific communities I wanted to include in the research process and asking for recommendations. In this case, I drew on referees from the broader community, not limiting the scope of opinions sought to adult educators and feminists. Similar to my initial recruitment and sampling process, the targeted process followed specific steps with each potential participant and these women were in varying stages of recruitment and sampling at any given time.

**Challenges Encountered During Targeted Recruitment and Selection Process**

Selected participants did fulfil maximum variation for the most part; however, there were limitations associated with this approach. With such a small sample (10 educators in total), it was impossible to truly represent all facets of identity that would help create multiple knowledges that could contribute to a feminist standpoint. As well, the approach of sampling for maximum variation itself is limited, as it cannot capture the multiple, layered and intersecting, nuanced approach to identity that this research is calling for.

There were still other challenges presented in recruiting and sampling for a variance of situated knowledges. First Nations/Métis women were difficult to recruit in part due to my lack of broad connections to these communities in Ontario. While I had a great response and interest in the topic from many First Nations/Métis women via email,
it was challenging to organize for these women to participate in the research beyond this level of involvement due to work, family and travel commitments.

This difficulty in recruitment and participation may also be attributed to my Whiteness, which may trigger historical distrust with individuals of First Nations/Métis ancestry. In addition, I was informed by a potential participant of First Nations descent during a screening call that, because of the matrilineal nature of indigenous societies, I would never find a First Nations woman who called herself a feminist. Given that this potential participant did not design non-credit sessions with women, she either misunderstood the criteria or got in contact with me to share the opinion that First Nations women do not align with feminism. Contention over the term “feminist” was most pronounced in this instance, but there were still many distinctions in terms of how potential participants identified in relation to feminisms.

It was also challenging to recruit women living with (dis)abilities. Early on in the recruitment process, I had a referral for a potential participant living with (dis)abilities, who unfortunately, as a result of her (dis)abilities, was not able to take part at that time. Subsequent attempts yielded contact with women who act as advocates, but there appear to be relatively few feminist educators with (dis)abilities, and particularly with visible (dis)abilities, who work with women who live with (dis)abilities in Ontario. The multiple barriers facing women who live with (dis)abilities create a general lack of participation in feminist non-credit learning processes, which is a subject that will be elaborated on in the discussion of findings.

Despite my best efforts at variance in education level, all research participants had a university bachelor’s degree or higher. One potential participant with a college-level
education asked her referee whether she had anything worthwhile to share. Other potential participants were preoccupied about the value of their contributions and the prospect of participating in a research project situated in a university. This context may have been alienating to women who had not previously attended university and were not particularly comfortable in a university environment. It is also interesting to contemplate the degree to which potential participants felt they needed to be versed in an academic discourse of feminism, undervaluing their lived experience doing feminist practice.

Finally, while there were Queer, Lesbian, Two-Spirited and Straight-identified women participating in the research, Transgendered, Intersexual and Asexual perspectives are left out of the findings of the dissertation. While a great deal of discussion emerged through the data collection process about the inclusion of Trans-identified women in feminist non-credit learning processes, no Trans-identified women were suggested through the initial recruitment process and this was not an identity I specifically looked for in the targeted recruitment process. With more inclusion of women of varying sexual orientations, this dissertation would provide greater insights as a result of these situated knowledges.

**Selected Research Participants and Learning Processes**

In total, I selected 10 research participants, who represent 11 specific non-credit learning processes in urban centres within Ontario. Within these processes five different categories of group learning goals were represented (see Table 1, Feminist Educators Learning Processes). All participants were given the option to remain anonymous in the research. Two women, Tina Lopez and Roberta Timothy, who work as independent
facilitators and consult with various groups, chose to be identified by their real names. The other participants are referred to by pseudonyms and identifying information has been altered in order to maintain participant confidentiality. In all cases, organizations hosting the feminist non-credit learning processes have not been identified.

Participants ranged in age from 23 to 71 years. Many facilitated on an ongoing basis and were drawing on experiences more recent than five years ago. The majority of the educators had led far more than two groups, with the average number of years experience as a feminist educator being more than ten. All participants identified with some form of feminism with varying degrees of specification or caveats, such as Womanist, Black Feminist or Indigenous Feminist, as detailed in the description of participants that follows in this chapter.

Out of the ten participants, four were feminist educators with whom I had a prior relationship, one was a casual acquaintance, and five were women I did not know. Having prior relationships with some of the participants helped with building rapport and trust. In some instances, however, they may have felt that I was already familiar with their contexts or processes and therefore may not have fully elaborated on the details of their practices.

**Description of Feminist Educators**

I asked each of the women participating to self identify in ways that were important to her. In the following section, I will present a brief description of each feminist educator (also see Appendix E: Feminist Educators Social locations).
1. “Viv” identifies as a White middle class woman in her 60s. Viv has a Master’s degree. In this research, she shares her learnings based on her experiences co-facilitating union trainings for women.

2. “Mika” identifies as a working class First Nations woman of mixed heritage in her 20s and as Two-Spirited. Mika identifies as an Indigenous Feminist. In this research, she shares a process she co-facilitated called “The Reclaiming Indigenous Feminism Project.” She has an undergraduate degree but feels she got all her teachings through her work in different communities.

3. “Nina” identifies as a Queer middle class White woman in her 40s. Nina has an undergraduate degree. She has facilitated learning processes with homeless women and reflects on what she has learned through participating in this research.

4. “Brenda” identifies as a Jewish Lesbian with limited mobility. She has a Master’s degree and is a feminist educator in her 70s. In this research, she shares insights from a facilitation training-the-trainer program she co-designed and facilitated.

5. “Sam” identifies as a White woman living with a (dis)ability. Sam has a Master’s degree. Through this research, she reflects on facilitating women who are deaf and living with (dis)abilities.

6. Tina Lopez identifies as a straight South Asian women in her 40s. Tina has a Master’s degree. Tina shares her learnings based on her experiences facilitating workplace organizational change processes with women who work in the social services sector.
7. *Roberta Timothy* identifies as a Queer working class African woman of Caribbean
descent living with a (dis)ability who is in her 30s. Roberta has a Ph.D. and identifies
as a Womanist. Through this research, Roberta reflects on facilitating in Trauma or
Psycho Educational processes and with women working in women’s shelters.

8. “*Bezawit*” identifies as a Black, Lesbian feminist. Bezawit is in her 50s and is middle
class. Bezawit has a Master’s degree and identifies as a Black Feminist. In this
research, she shares insights from a facilitation training-the-trainer program she co-
designed and facilitated.

9. “*Em*” identifies as a White, upper class woman in her 40s. Em has a Master’s degree.
She shares her learnings based on her experiences co-facilitating union trainings for
women.

10. “*Alma*” identifies as a woman, a woman of colour, and a Lesbian. Alma identifies as
South Asian, middle class, and is in her 40s. Alma has a Master’s degree. In this
research, she shares her learnings based on her experiences facilitating an
autonomous women’s support group and training for women working in social
services.

**Feminist Educators’ Learning Processes**

As mentioned, feminist educators represent 11 specific non-credit learning
processes that work towards different learning goals and which are sponsored by a
variety of different organizations.\textsuperscript{16} Each of these processes was chosen based on the feminist educators’ focus on promoting solidarity among differently-located women while simultaneously working to raise consciousness around the differences that can divide women. The following is a description of the feminist non-credit learning processes conducted (see Table 1, Feminist Educators Learning Processes).

There were two learning processes I examined that were established for the purpose of providing women with personal support. The Trauma or Psycho Educational processes were run in a variety of contexts, were both co- and solo-facilitated by Roberta Timothy and involved small\textsuperscript{17} groups. Participants attended voluntarily and these were closed\textsuperscript{18} groups. The Women’s Support Group was an open group that has been conducted weekly over several years. This process was solo facilitated by Roberta Timothy.

There was one group established for the purpose of social action, which was the Black Women –Women of African Descent group. This unsponsored process involved a solo facilitator working with a variety of women in African-Black communities in both “one-off” meetings and ongoing groups.

The goal of the “Reclaiming Indigenous Feminisms Project” was to connect women across feminisms. This process was a voluntary open group\textsuperscript{19} led by a team of

\textsuperscript{16} In all cases the names of organizations that were sites that hosted feminist non-credit learning processes within this research have not been identified to maintain confidentiality.

\textsuperscript{17} In this research I refer to a small group as fewer than 18 people.

\textsuperscript{18} A closed group refers to a group that has a fixed membership of participants who attend each session. In a closed group it is not permissible to drop in and attend only one or a few sessions in the process.

\textsuperscript{19} An open group refers to a group without fixed membership that anyone can attend. In an open group a participant can drop in and attend a portion of the process.
facilitators and took place over several days for a large group. This process took place several times, and Mika has been involved in similar processes over many years.

Within the goal of training I looked at four learning processes. The first training process was at a drop-in centre and involved a series of sessions in consciousness raising and life skills for small groups of women, which was solo facilitated by Nina. It was an open process for women using the drop-in. These women were working through addictions and mental health issues; they were street involved and experiencing homelessness. A large portion of the demographic was seniors. The second was a spokesperson training series designed for women with (dis)abilities. This was a small closed group, and the objective was to train women with (dis)abilities to be leaders in the community around issues related to violence against women and, in particular, violence against women with (dis)abilities. This group was co-facilitated by Sam and a colleague. The process ran once, with weekly meetings that took place over several months. The next process within training was a Facilitator Train-The-Trainer Program was designed to equip women with the skills to lead self-help groups for women in their own communities. This process was hosted by a women’s support service, was a voluntary closed group and required over 80 hours of group time. The process involved a small group and was co-facilitated by Bezawit and Brenda and run for many different groups of women, as opposed to being a onetime project. Finally, Em and Viv co-facilitated Train-the-Trainer processes for union women. These processes were a series of large group processes aimed at building skills for workers to lead processes promoting women’s

20 In this research I refer to a large group as more than 18 people.
leadership skills. These trainings were open to selected women within the union membership.

Three learning processes were established to promote organizational change and professional development. Tina Lopez conducted processes with staff of women’s shelters and with workplace teams comprised of women. In women’s shelters, the processes were aimed at working through conflict among women on staff that was affecting the delivery of services to other women. These were closed processes that lasted varying lengths of time, were co-facilitated and were conducted over a period of time (as opposed to being “one-off” meetings). Tina’s facilitated processes also involved women-only senior management teams or committees focused on women’s issues within social service organizations. These processes were aimed at uncovering institutional policies that enable oppressive practices to exist within organizations and at building anti-oppression practices into the day-to-day functioning of a group.

Also within organizational change and professional development Alma designed and led processes to raise consciousness among staff working in social service agencies for women. These processes included both small and large closed groups and tended to be short in duration, with the minimum length of a session being three hours.
### Table 1

**Feminist Educators Learning Processes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What It Is Called</th>
<th>Who Sponsors</th>
<th>Who Attends</th>
<th>Group Goal</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Open or Closed Process?</th>
<th>Educator(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Personal Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Support Group</td>
<td>Independent Individual</td>
<td>Any woman who has experienced violence</td>
<td>Personal Support</td>
<td>Weekly meeting</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Alma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma or Psycho Educational Process</td>
<td></td>
<td>Any women who has experienced violence</td>
<td>Personal Support</td>
<td>Different sporadic workshops; ongoing</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Roberta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Social Action</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Women - Women of African Descent Social Action Group</td>
<td>Black Women - Women Of African Descent</td>
<td>Social Action</td>
<td>Different sporadic workshops; ongoing</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Roberta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Connecting Across Feminisms</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reclaiming Indigenous Feminism Project</td>
<td>Community Group</td>
<td>Any woman</td>
<td>Connecting Feminists</td>
<td>Workshop over several days</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Mika</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. As mentioned, an open group refers to a group without fixed membership that anyone can attend. In an open group a participant can drop in and attend a portion of the process. A closed group refers to a group that has a fixed membership of participants who attend each session. In a closed group it is not permissible to drop in and attend only one or a few sessions in the process.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What It Is Called</th>
<th>Who Sponsors</th>
<th>Who Attends</th>
<th>Process Goal</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Open or Closed Process?</th>
<th>Educator(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consciousness Raising and Life Skills Workshops</td>
<td>Social Service - Drop-In Centre</td>
<td>Women experiencing homelessness</td>
<td>Consciousness Raising and Life Skills Workshops</td>
<td>Workshop series over several sessions</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Nina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spokesperson Training</td>
<td>Social Service – Women’s Service</td>
<td>Women living with (dis)abilities</td>
<td>Train Spokespersons</td>
<td>Workshop series over several months</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Sam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator Train-the-Trainer Program</td>
<td>Social Service – Women’s Service</td>
<td>Woman selected through application process</td>
<td>Training to Run Women’s Self-Help Groups</td>
<td>Workshop series over several months</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Bezawit, Brenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Leadership Development Training Program</td>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>Selected women working in the union</td>
<td>Leadership Development</td>
<td>Training Series; set of courses</td>
<td>Closed; only selected women who are part of the union</td>
<td>Vivian, Em</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Organization Change /Professional Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Shelters Staff Development &amp; Organizational Change</td>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>Women working in Women’s Shelters</td>
<td>Organizational Change /Professional Development &amp; Awareness</td>
<td>Process over several months</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Tina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What It Is Called</td>
<td>Who Sponsors</td>
<td>Who Attends</td>
<td>Process Goal</td>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Open or Closed Process?</td>
<td>Educato(r)(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Leadership Development</td>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>Women in leadership within a given organization</td>
<td>Professional Development &amp; Awareness</td>
<td>Staff meetings over several months</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Tina</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Organizational Change & Professional Development (con’t)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What It Is Called</th>
<th>Who Sponsors</th>
<th>Who Attends</th>
<th>Process Goal</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Open or Closed Process?</th>
<th>Educato(r)(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff Development</td>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>Women working in Women’s Services</td>
<td>Professional Development &amp; Awareness</td>
<td>Staff meetings over several sessions</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Alma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

Research Journal

I kept a research journal throughout the course of the research. I used this journal to track issues and dilemmas that arose in the recruitment and sampling processes, as well as in communications with participants before we met for interviews. I took notes in this journal immediately after interviews and focus groups, noting the time, date and location of the meeting. I also drew a map of the meeting space and the seating arrangement to assist in my recall of the conversation.

Primarily, I used the journal to capture my personal process of knowledge creation as I conducted the research, capturing information that would not exist elsewhere. I wrote about my observations of each interview and the focus of each conversation. I also reflected on nonverbal cues, the subtexts and overall tone of the interviews. In these notes, I recorded hunches about themes emerging in the data, which informed follow-up questions in later interviews and focus groups.

Interviews with Feminist Educators

I conducted 21 semi-structured interviews, with the 10 feminist educators between March 2008 and July 2009. The majority of interviews were conducted one-on-one, except for with one facilitation team made up of two educators whom I interviewed together. I conducted two interviews with the pair and five individual feminist educators. I conducted three interviews with the three other feminist educators.
For interview questions refer to Appendix F: Educators Interview General Question Guide. Each interview lasted 1 – 1 ½ hours. In appreciation for the multiple and competing roles that women assume, interviews were arranged at a time and location most convenient for the women participating. In some cases, I went to the educator’s home or office; in other cases, we held our interviews in a meeting room at OISE.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, I strove to examine a range of processes that met different goals and were sponsored by different organizations. However, in order to focus the scope of the interviews, I mostly concentrated on a single learning process, even though most women had facilitated and designed a range feminist non-credit learning processes in a number of different settings. For that reason, the interviews focused primarily on a single context that the educator felt represented a successful experience in facilitating processes that help women participants to gain a consciousness around their identity and issues of power and oppression within learning processes that also valued feminist solidarity and women’s common interests.

These interviews were semi-structured, and I tried to encourage open dialogues in an effort to focus on experience and storytelling. I initially asked the educators about the approaches they used when leading women’s non-formal learning processes and I explored their successes and what they had learned. These initial interviews used a semi-structured question guide (See Appendix G: Educators General Interview Guide). In interviews conducted later in the process, I honed the research questions, focusing in on the ways in which educators attended (or did not attend) to women’s multiple differences and explored (or did not explore) specific social locations. While the interviews conducted later in the process were more focused, I still used a semi-structured interview
guide, asking more pointed questions in an effort to shed new light on the themes being investigated (See Appendix G: Educators Specific Interview Guide).

Subsequent interviews focused on clarifying themes touched on in prior interviews and elaborating on the specificities of what worked in the educator’s context and site. I also questioned educators about issues that surfaced during interviews with their peers, which they may not have introduced.

Interviews were conducted from a feminist perspective. I was upfront about my entry point as a feminist educator (Oakley, 2003) who occupies social locations of privilege as well as oppression. I approached my interactions with the educators as a valuable opportunity to speak with women whose work I admired and wanted to help codify so that other women could benefit from their knowledge. In this way, I worked to establish rapport and ask open-ended questions.

Because of my desire to use a feminist approach that was non-hierarchical and unstructured, my initial interviews were less focused in the beginning. I needed to pose more specific questions, hone in on key points and ask the feminist educators to elaborate more fully on their responses. My overuse of minimal encouragers (such as “um hmm,” “yeah,” head nodding, etc.) may also have created limits within the data, as participants avoided elaborating on points, assuming that I understood. For these reasons, I asked some of the feminist educators to have a third interview with me.

In the initial, less focused interviews, some of the feminist educators spoke about their history and why they are drawn to this work. Several also spoke about the barriers and challenges associated with their work, and the majority shared general practices that are well known among facilitators of small group processes. I have drawn on some of this
data in this dissertation, but a great deal of it was not useful in illuminating the area of inquiry. In subsequent interviews, the questions I asked were more focused and I probed for details about practices that the educators thought were working but that are not as well known in the field. I also invited feminist educators who were grappling with naming successful practices to consider practices they could *imagine* which might be effective.

The CAP approach also created challenges, as it was difficult to maintain the tension between critical and appreciative. Articulating the research focus and interview questions with this balance in mind was straightforward. However, throughout the data collection stage, I had to constantly realign the feminist educators’ focus towards what was working during the interviews and focus groups, as their tendency was to elaborate on the challenges associated with the work. This barrier may have occurred because the educators, by definition, work in a challenging environment and felt that this context was important to elaborate on. As women and feminists, the educators also identify with the struggles women face, and they may have felt unwilling to let go of this identification. Finally, the educators may have, in some cases, felt unsure about whether their practices were working and therefore were tentative about putting them forward confidently as successful practices.

*Production of Interview Transcripts*

I recorded all of the interviews and transcribed them verbatim as soon as possible after they took place in order to remember my interactions with the educators and to capture as much meaning as possible. I also drew on my research journal to recall
nuances, such as body language, and to consider the potential meaning of pauses. Upon completing a transcript, I listened to each recording again in order to observe where participants stopped mid thought and changed direction in their stories to evade uncomplimentary ideas or thoughts that were coming up as they spoke. I listened for what was not said and to the underlying threads in the conversation.

After each transcript was produced and reviewed for a second time, I created a more condensed document of the main points that resulted from the conversation. This Main Points document was a preliminary level of analysis. I emailed the Main Points document and the transcript to each feminist educator for her feedback and approval. The majority of the participants responded quickly, saying that the documents looked fine. In one case, a participant requested that I change her original wording to reflect phrasing that she was more comfortable with.

**Focus Groups with Feminist Educators**

I conducted two semi-structured focus groups with two different groups of the recruited educators, which each lasted approximately three hours. Six feminist educators attended in total. Focus groups were conducted at OISE, as the participants agreed that it was a central location. The focus groups were conducted following the individual interviews; I anticipated that the educators' reflections would deepen as they interacted with their peers.

The focus groups were held in the evening and began with food. This allowed time for participants to connect informally, which put them at ease. This informal time
also enabled the focus groups’ process to create or solidify a community of feminist educators working on non-formal learning processes.

The questions asked in the focus groups were shaped by the findings from the interviews. In this manner, the focus groups confirmed the validity of the data that had been collected prior and explored interesting themes that had emerged from subsequent interviews and focus groups. At the focus group, I also presented a diagram conveying preliminary findings in order to receive participants’ feedback and input (Appendix H: Educators Focus Group Question Guide).

The greatest challenge associated with the focus groups was finding a time when the greatest majority of participants could attend. Each focus group was rescheduled several times and as a result it took several months from the time I started organizing them before each focus group took place. Of the four participants who did not attend a focus group, three had reoccurring conflicts due to family care they needed to provide; support and tasks that are typically women’s work. It was also a greater challenge in the focus groups (than in the interviews) to concentrate on what facilitators do within their practices that enables raising consciousness and promoting understanding around multiple, intersecting or interlocking identities and oppressions. As a group, the feminist educators were more persistent about sharing the difficulties associated with facilitating their learning processes, and I frequently had to redirect them. In some cases, the group was not able to move on from talking about the difficulties.

Other challenges included mediating participants’ contributions so that some women did not dominate and negotiating trying to go in depth while at the same time discussing the areas that were important to cover.
Production of Focus Group Transcripts

As with the interviews, the focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, with pauses and verbal hesitations noted. At one focus group, I had a note taker present to record when someone began speaking. These notes were helpful in making an accurate transcription in cases where voices were hard to identify on the recording. In the second focus group, there were fewer people and they had distinct voices, so a note taker was not necessary.

Similar to the interview process, I worked on transcribing right after the focus group and relistened to each recording after the transcription was complete in order to capture the subtle meanings of voice intonation and group dynamics. Again, I produced a Main Points document as a preliminary level of analysis and shared these and the transcripts with the feminist educators who attended the focus group in order to get their feedback.

Data Analysis

I analysed the data as I collected it, looking for emerging themes, and I allowed the analysis to guide where I looked for more data. The initial level of analysis was conducted through reviewing transcripts and picking out the main points that were made. This consisted of connecting themes that wove through the conversation and presenting them in a linear fashion. The feminist educators then played a role in data analysis by making corrections and additions to the Main Points document.
The last stage consisted of reflecting on gaps in the data. From the Main Points, I kept a list of emerging themes that grew cumulatively, and I rearranged these into new groupings and recorded subthemes as the data collection process progressed. From this analysis, I determined the shape of the overall discussion of the findings, which reflects three areas: 1) barriers or challenges feminist educators encountered doing this work, 2) the pedagogies and practices feminist educators find successful in helping women participants to gain a consciousness around their identity and issues of power and oppression, particularly in integrating issues of intersecting and interlocking oppressions into women participants' understanding and 3) pedagogies and practices I feel would be helpful, drawing on my own experiences as a feminist educator and the gaps and omissions I perceived in what the feminist educators shared. I was then guided primarily by the questions I developed to further analyse the data, on which I elaborated in Chapter Two.

I began by analysing the barriers or challenges feminist educators encountered doing this work. I had not originally intended to look at this aspect, but the need to explore barriers or challenges emerged as a result of using the CAP and the number of times that the feminist educators brought up the barriers and the challenges associated with their work. I chose to begin my analysis from the perspective of deficiencies in order to more fully contextualize what is working. To do this section of the analysis, I primarily drew on the Main Points documents, looking for where barriers were mentioned and organizing these into themes and subthemes.

I then reflected on the feminist educators contexts in order to more fully discern what practices feminist educators said were working. In analyzing the remainder of the
data, I utilized the questions I discussed in Chapter Two as a guide. In order to centre on the experiences of the feminist educators, I endeavored to quote their words directly as much as possible. For this reason, I worked intensively with the transcripts and Main Points texts and only peripherally with my research journal.

I began first by reviewing the Main Points documents, reading for how the concepts of intersecting and interlocking identities make sense to feminist educators and play a part in feminist non-credit learning processes. In areas where I required more detail, I returned to the transcripts to contextualize, fill out and/or corroborate the information I had pulled out during the preliminary analysis. As a final step, I reviewed all transcripts to ensure I had not missed any pertinent data.

In the last stage of the dissertation, I reflected on and responded to gaps in the data, proposing additional pedagogies and practices that I felt would help women learners to gain a consciousness around their identity and issues of power and oppression. At this point I drew less directly on the data collected and more on my research journal. As I analysed the data in the previous stages, I continued to make observations in my research journal, noting what feminist educators provoked me to think about. In this way, my reflections drew on my own experience as a feminist educator and explored and elaborated on the omissions, gaps and experimentation within feminist educators’ pedagogies and practices.
CHAPTER FOUR:
BARRIERS & CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH “DOING INTERSECTIONALITY” IN FEMINIST NON-CREDIT LEARNING PROCESSES

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the barriers and challenges that feminist educators experienced when facilitating non-credit learning processes with women. As mentioned previously, I did not explicitly ask about barriers or challenges during data collection. Rather, many of the educators diverted from directly answering questions about what successful practices they had utilized in favour of elaborating on the difficulties they faced.

Feminist educators stressed that difficulties and challenges were the cornerstone of the learning processes they led. Roberta Timothy\textsuperscript{21} stated (August 10, 2009\textsuperscript{22}), “The reason the groups have come about is because the world is not ideal.” As she observed (August 10, 2009):

There are not enough women’s groups out there and there are not enough resources and funding for women groups. There are centres, manuals, […] men-based education systems. […] We’re trying to do work because it doesn’t exist out there in the mainstream society. So I think our groups come from that.

\textsuperscript{21} In most cases, throughout this and subsequent chapters dedicated to research findings, I have quoted the feminist educators verbatim and have identified women by pseudonym, or name if they elected to forgo confidentiality.

\textsuperscript{22} For ease of reading I have eliminated including “personal communication” in citations for interviews or focus groups with educators who participated in this research. In instances where citations include “personal communication” this indicates a communication with those beyond the group of educators participating in this research.
Brenda stressed the degree of difficulty in facilitating these learning processes when she said (August 10, 2009), “All contexts, which were so completely different, nowhere could I imagine any of them becoming ideal or even workable on some level.”

While such challenges and barriers create the impetus for feminist non-credit learning processes it is important to understand at the outset that these challenges were not insurmountable. To put this chapter in context it must be read alongside Chapter Five, which explores the practices feminist educators found successful, in order to appreciate the ways in which feminist educators skilfully addressed barriers and worked through challenges.

In isolation, this chapter discredits the feminist educators who trusted me to reflect the effectiveness of their work. This trust surfaced as Viv said, referring to me, “this isn’t somebody trying to trash [the] program.” As another feminist educator said, “I wouldn't sit with you if what you're trying to do here is in any way, shape or form going to show me as a person who's incapable” (Alma, June 11, 2009). By saying this, both educators indicated their assumption that I would be portraying their work in a positive light. I believe these comments were meant as a vote of confidence; yet they also drew attention to my ability as a researcher to portray their stories in a way that could be damaging. These comments reinforce my desire to ensure that this research provides critical analysis and tools for feminist educators, rather than fuelling destructive or divisive discourses about women’s learning spaces and movements. I offer this chapter in that spirit.

Not all feminist educators had a great deal to say about barriers. However, everyone did mention them. I speculate that this unintended focus on barriers and
challenges may have arisen for several reasons. To begin, feminist educators work in challenging circumstances by definition; feminist non-credit learning processes exist as a result of the oppressions women face. As a result, feminist educators face large barriers constantly. This focus on barriers may have mirrored the approaches feminist educators are accustomed to taking in the learning processes they lead. As Em observed (April 24, 2008) about raising feminist consciousness, “often the starting point is naming the ways in which women suffer.” This reality may mean that talking about challenges and barriers was an automatic response for many of the educators, regardless of the questions posed. It may have been therapeutic for educators to have a forum to vent about the challenges they face. It may also have been second nature to speak at length about barriers and challenges before relating what was working. In this way speaking about barriers and challenges may have been a way for educators to come to, or uncover their thoughts about practices they have found effective.

It is evident that feminist educators are marginalized as women and as educators doing the challenging work of consciousness-raising with women learners around identity, power and oppression. Thus, when educators spoke about successes, they may have felt like they were ignoring or even denying the harsh realities that they, and the women with whom they work, face. In this way, talking solely, or even primarily, about successes may have challenged feminist educators’ very self concept, which are hard to deconstruct through the course of two or three interviews. Talking solely about success also may have decontextualized their work in unhelpful ways.

I also speculate that feminist educators may have relished their “war stories.” I felt this particularly in the focus group, where there was a long discussion about
challenges. Feminist educators may have shared these stories because of the rare opportunity to do so with others who would relate, to create connection around the difficult work or to demonstrate their inclusion in the group culture.

This chapter on barriers and challenges shows the context of feminist learning processes and creates the foundation for subsequent discussions in this dissertation. In this chapter, I reflect on the challenges associated with recognizing differences among women within a context of valuing solidarity as feminist educators related them to me. These include acknowledging and addressing behaviours connected to privileged aspects of participants’ social locations, raising and working across different social locations and other barriers more broadly linked to the societal/cultural context.

**Intersectionality and Interlocking Identities**

Educators spoke directly about intersectionality when mentioning several challenges associated with their work. As mentioned in Chapter Three an intersectionality framework includes the understanding that:

1) Identity is made up of multiple social locations, or identities (Crenshaw, 1989)
2) All facets of identity are separate, yet joined simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1989)
3) Multiple oppressions are compounding in nature. The more identities of oppression one occupies - considering the barriers of racism, sexism, heteronormativity, classism (among others) - the more difficult it will be to cross the intersection, or exist free of impediment (Crenshaw, 1989)
4) Power differentials are associated with different aspects of identity (Hill-Collins, 1990)
5) Power differentials are based on systemic processes, as expressed through Hill-Collins (1990) matrix of domination
In terms of how aspects of practice resonated with an intersectionality framework, one challenging aspect feminist educators spoke about was the struggle of working with multiple realities at the same time, without privileging one over another. As Roberta noted (June 12, 2009), her goal was to ensure no aspect of identity became more salient than another. She said:

When we’re talking about gender, race is put back [and there is the] anti-colonial perspective that doesn’t talk about sexism or misogyny. This is why I’m really afraid of just putting one factor. The intersectional approach is to stop that.

Tina also noticed (July 30, 2009), it is “harder to keep some ‘isms’ on the table – [and] therefore hard to do intersectionality when women are wriggling out of looking at or dealing with certain identities.”

These statements suggest the goal is to keep all aspects of oppression in the discussion at all times. This goal raises the issue of what is doable, or even desirable in terms of working with intersectional and interlocking oppressions. In Chapter Five, I will further problematize what is doable and desirable as I examine what feminist educators related felt were successful consciousness-raising practices that integrated an intersectional/interlocking framework into women learners’ understanding.

One educator also mentioned intersectionality, but I also felt she was directly referencing an interlocking identities framework. As mentioned in Chapter Three an interlocking oppressions framework includes the understanding that:

1) Interlocking oppression accounts for how race, class, gender [as well as other identities] co-constitute one another in ways that cannot be separated in White supremacist capitalist patriarchy (Razack & Fellows, 1998)
2) Systems of oppression come into existence in and through one another (Razack & Fellows, 1998)

Roberta related that honouring women learners multiple social locations while also negotiating the differential power associated with different social locations can be taxing. She illustrated this struggle as she recounted one group experience focused on raising issues of oppression. Roberta named (June 12, 2009) how this tension played out with a group of women as they shared different experiences that they had found oppressive:

The woman who’s talking about her working class background - and say she’s from Trinidad and she’s of African descent. […] [Oppression is] multiplied when you’re dealing with more issues than maybe the woman talking about [her parent not being able to send her to summer] camp. You’re not comparing them. This woman dealing with the camp, she’s dealing with an issue of violence, she’s dealing with an issue of maybe attachment or trust within her family, and looking at how some of the people in the group also deal with multiple layers. And yet, we’re all in the room doing the same thing. And this is a difficulty sometimes that happens - what we do on a daily basis when people are coming from such varied intersectional identities.

For me, the complexities involved in this interaction are representative of the challenges involved in engaging women. In theory, women’s different experiences of oppression could illuminate the many focuses of oppression. At a deeper level, this sharing could also shed light on how disparate realities of women affect and even co-construct one another. However, sharing one’s reality can be deeply personal, and the vulnerability and trust required to make such disclosures is not taken into account by such theoretical
frameworks. In this scenario, I can easily see why the working class Trinidadian woman of African descent would be offended to have her multiple oppressions spoken about in the same breath as the oppression involved in being unable to go to summer camp. I can also see how the White woman might recoil, as a pain that was very real to her was interpreted as trivial by others in the group. I can easily imagine an impasse in the conversation resulting, and it being a challenge to keep differently-located participants engaged.

**Roots of the Barriers Dividing Women**

*Perpetuation of Fear*

Alma suggested that fear permeates Western society and creates the context for the work of feminist educators (August 10, 2009). Other educators agreed. Bezawit said (November 12, 2009), “Particularly today, […] [there is] a narrative that exists in our society that is based in fear […] losing our homes, fear of dying, xenophobic fear, fear of the other” (November 12, 2009). Nina suggested that the culture of fear also includes the loss of innocence, trust and community. She noticed that complacency, individualization, and isolation create adverse conditions for consciousness-raising (Nina, November 12, 2009).

As I see it, fear can translate into disconnection, discomfort and conflict, resulting in many types of challenges that feminist educators face in their work. Bezawit nuanced

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23 While one feminist educator spoke about Whiteness as being constructed (Bezawit, May 9, 2008), most feminist educators who spoke about White women did not problematize Whiteness. In other words, it was unclear whether the women they were referring to would have identified themselves as White.
how fear affects individuals based on their social locations as she reflected (November 12, 2009):

We live in a society that is based on a culture of fear, but all of us aren’t afraid of the same things. And the reality of the matter is, for most of us, our starting point is not fear.

Through these words I understand that Bezawit is pointing to the fear that women with multiple aspects of privilege experience, which creates defensiveness and avoidance. This dynamic of privilege is a theme throughout this chapter.

**Challenges to Women’s Unity**

The feminist educators also noted how women can be divided based on their different social locations, both generally and as a result of exclusion of women with (dis)abilities.

**Based on the Myth of Sisterhood**

Several educators also reflected on how they find the notion of sisterhood challenging in their communities. Mika noted (April 20, 2009) that separations occur between women in First Nations communities, as these populations have lost their matriarchal structure:

because you’re not looking at your sisters anymore […] there’s no women’s society […] And so there’s this over reliance on men […] It’s a lot to take care of, to… have all of somebody’s issues put on you because they don’t want to talk to, they don’t have any girlfriends to talk to, or the girlfriends that they have are just not good people for them. I see that a lot.
This type of alienation from other women creates a barrier to embracing a feminist or women-centred learning process, as well as a need for it.

**Exclusion Within the Women’s Movement**

Exclusion within the women’s movement based on social locations is well documented, as discussed in Chapter One, which also creates barriers and challenges to facilitating learning processes for women. Mika described an example as she stated (April 20, 2009):

> Technically speaking, if we are doing what we say we do, I should be able to go to a women’s event, by myself, not know anybody and come out making friends with everybody. But what happens is, I will go and nobody will talk to me because I’m not part of their space or their collective or whatever. […] You stereotypically think that men are just buddy-buddy with everybody [yet] there are so many things that have to happen for somebody to talk to me even, right?

Also the lack of recognition of differences, especially power differentials, creates challenges to feminist educators who wish to engage differently-located women. For example, several educators complained that feminism too often centres on the experiences of White women only. As Brenda noted (January 30, 2009) one drawback of feminism is that, “there was no recognition that not all women's experience was the same for a long, long time. The women's movement put itself forward as representing all women […] it’s a history of White middle class women trying to find new and better ways to slough off the work they need to do around racism.” She notes that feminist
organizing is improving, but that there is still much to do. Bezawit stated (January 30, 2009):

It’s a way more diverse operation than it used to be, there's no question of that. But the credit for that must go to primarily, I think, African-Canadians and Aboriginal women who began to challenge what was going on several years ago.

However, an even greater barrier to consciousness-raising processes exists when some women have not had access to identifying as women at all. Sam shed light on this dynamic in the (dis)ability community as she remarked (August 10, 2009):

I think gender, to be quite honest with you, doesn’t even get to be part of that conversation, because more often than not, men, and in particular women, are de-gendered. So you know, we don’t even have a gender really, when we’re talking about the differences of experience, what gets to bring people together is their experience that have common threads around ableism or (dis)ability... People really struggle and say, “You know what, it’s not because I’m a woman, it’s because I’m (dis)abled that I’m experiencing marginalization”… how do you bring in that gender analysis where many women have not even been viewed as women?; that their (dis)ability becomes forefront.

This comment was particularly striking to me. Within this dissertation, it was assumed that being a woman was a common identification. What happens when it is not? The barriers to embracing an understanding of other facets of one’s social locations, or how they co-construct the identities of other will be great for a women living with (dis)abilities, if the first step in the learning process is to shift (dis)abled women’s thinking towards identifying more strongly as women. For this reason, it is even more
critical that learning processes value women’s solidarity and work to bridge the ways they are divided within patriarchal society.

**Exclusion Based on (Dis)Ability**

Divisions between women were also attributed to structural barriers. For example, Sam, who works with (dis)abled women, elaborated (August 10, 2009):

I think the opportunities for women to gather and come together and talk about those places where there are commonalities, those places where there are differences, happens more infrequently for women who are living with specific types of (dis)abilities. Spaces aren’t accessible in lots of different ways. And so, we’re not invited, or we’re not there.

Roberta, who also lives with a (dis)ability, noted that accommodations can also create divisions among communities of women living with (dis)abilities. Roberta said (August 10, 2009):

They dichotomize people with (dis)abilities and accessibility issues... there was space, but was it accessible for wheelchairs, or was it accessible for hearing-impaired? So you’re constantly fighting for resources or fighting for whose issue is really more important to deal with.

This is a classic example of the hierarchization of oppressions, which is a divide and conquer strategy pitting individuals with marginalized social locations against one another, which also presents considerable hurdles.
Challenges When Working With Transgendered Women

Within this research many challenges and many different social locations were named by feminist educators. Trans women and Trans issues were not among them. I felt this was an important issue, and so probed the feminist educators about their experiences. They spoke of the challenges Trans women often face in having their needs met through feminist learning processes, such as lack of services. They also discussed the challenges they faced when working with Trans identified women.

When speaking of the problems Trans women faced in having their needs met through feminist learning processes, Alma noted that there are few services or programs for transgendered women and only “a very, very small portion of our community [of educators] that has done work with the transgendered groups” (Alma, June 11, 2009). Alma mentioned that when Trans women did have access to services that they were not integrated into feminist groups for the most part. She pointed out that Trans women are often worked with in isolation (June 11, 2009), “The only place […] was that very specific work that I did for transgendered women and sex trade workers.”

Several educators seemed aware of the debates in women’s circles about the inclusion of Trans women in all women’s spaces. Brenda spoke about the challenge of embracing Trans politics. As she related (January 30, 2009):

we came late to Trans politics and I'm still trying to work with Trans politics because having such a long and strong history and background in working with issues of violence against women, I find it very difficult to let go of a gender polarity.
Other educators spoke about how they felt challenged when working with Trans identified women. Alma found the consciousness-raising work she did with Trans women involved in the sex trade was a challenge. She reflected (June 11, 2009):

You naturally would like to work with the group but if they're not ready, if their issues are far greater than probably what we had anticipated in terms of what the projects needed… We didn't have enough resources for them. They would like to be reimbursed for attending meetings. Because they could otherwise be paid $50 an hour on the street instead of sitting with you listening to this nonsense, right?

Meanwhile, Roberta spoke about the challenge of negotiating the sometimes misogynistic views of women who have transitioned from being men. She said (June 12, 2009):

There are Trans women who are dealing with their own deconstruction of misogyny; based on their male role that they've identified with […] I’ve seen transgendered women who have taken up space quite like a male would. And they’re learning to unlearn their own male-identified power within the group.

Alma also commented (June 11, 2009):

Like a lot of the transgendered women in that group were heterosexual and sexist in some ways in their thinking. There were a few who were espousing feminism and women power and that, but a lot of them have... because this was mainly M to F, male to female.

In my experience, this dynamic is not limited to Trans women. In consciousness-raising learning processes, there are many male-identified women who need to unlearn misogynistic and heterosexist views. In this regard, challenging Trans women on their
biases may not be very different than addressing the inappropriate behaviours of women who were biologically born as women stemming from their entrenchment in patriarchy.

Roberta noted another similarity between Trans women and women biologically born as women; sometimes transgendered women are not comfortable to participate, just as women in general frequently feel self-conscious in group processes. She reflected (June 12, 2009):

They’ve been treated in a particular way among other women within the group or within society, that they feel they don’t want to take up any space at all. They are feeling like they have nothing to share, because they’re learning how to be comfortable in the world of women. It’s one thing to be comfortable in your body, the next thing is being comfortable with other women. Women who’ve been biologically born as women still have trouble being with each other in a group, as you know. So why would we think that transgendered women wouldn’t have trouble also?

Roberta noticed that groups are reluctant to take up Trans issues in dialogue, and even when they do the conversation does not go far enough. She said (June 12, 2009):

I think there’s a communications gap between transgendered women and women in terms of groups […] I really think that people don’t want to talk about Trans phobia only; they don’t want to talk about misogyny and anti-feminism. And you need to talk about all of them to actually create a diverse group.

When I asked feminist educators whether they discussed Trans issues in their groups all of the feminists said they felt raising these issues were important even if they could not point to practices of how to engage in this dialogue. Many said they had no
experience working with Trans women – maybe because they did not recognize the Trans women who were in their groups.

Assuming Trans women are not present, or putting the onus on Trans women also creates a barrier to learning, not only to Trans women but other women who need to be sensitive to Trans politics. As Roberta pointed out, you cannot make assumptions about women’s identity when it comes to Trans issues. She shared (June 12, 2009):

I’ve seen straight-identified women who are then lesbian-identified women, and then are Trans. I mean, there are so many changes, and the changes are quicker and quicker. People go back and forth [in terms of] fluidity or flexibility. The ultra-straight person is not an ultra-straight person. […] We don’t know who’s transitioning within the room.

Challenges Associated with “Doing Intersectionality” in Feminist Non-Credit Learning Processes

Acknowledging and Addressing Privilege

The feminist educators spoke most often about the challenge of addressing privilege24 with women learners. In particular, many of the educators spoke about the challenge of addressing privilege with White women.

While all-women groups are designed to eliminate patriarchal privilege, educators noted that women reproduce the same hierarchical dynamics of privilege they so often critique in men. Nina (November 12, 2009) illustrated this as she stated:

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24 I approached the issue of privilege from the perspective that while some women have more privilege than others, all women experience oppression. While there are important power differentials that need to be attended to the idea that some women are winning while others are losing is a concept that hinders solidarity.
In the women’s group the White women start to dominate or the middle class women start to dominate. I do think that White women have no concept of the space they’re taking up really. And I think when they get free of men in the group, in fact it can get worse, because the one thing that was keeping a White woman quieter or keeping her from taking up so much space, is now gone. And so sometimes people, given a lot of room, they don’t do really well with that and all of a sudden you’ve got a very over-bearing and very vocal White woman. Removing the men doesn’t solve the problems, as we all know it can create a situation where the women with more privilege actually occupy that spot.

Educators must address behaviours associated with privilege because these can cause trauma to other more marginalized group members. Bezawit showed me how woman with White skin privilege are able to cause trauma and lose the trust of the rest of the group. She stated (April 23, 2009):

[When] you throw your hands up and you scream and you stomp out of the group, you do create an impact on people and that impact - and sometimes, you can never get that back because people will never be able to see you as somehow caring for the group [after that]. They will never see you as taking responsibility or they will neither be able to trust you to take responsibility. Anytime you get to the defensive mode, then you already create such a trauma for the rest of the group by your behaviour that even if you come back and you apologize, people are always watching you. They're guarded, because they know that at any point you can throw your hands up in the air again.

This scenario underlines the fragility of trust. Trust requires a lot of effort and integrity to maintain and such behaviour can erode trust in the participant with privilege as well as in the educator to restore a positive learning environment and group culture.
All the feminist educators spoke about situations in which they are called on to challenge privileged behaviours. However, only a few of them spoke about how complicated it is to challenge learners. Despite their silence on this topic, I suspect that many other feminist educators would identify with Nina, who reflected (April 13, 2009), “I don't necessarily put people on the spot to say, you know, ‘This is what your privilege looks like in this moment.’ In a workshop, I just...I don't know how to do that in an effective way.”

Tina also spoke about the power dynamics involved in addressing the privilege of those in leadership positions within the organizations she worked for as a consultant. She commented (July 3, 2009):

Even in 2009, most of the women’s organizations I work with are still predominately White and heterosexual. Or at least the people in decision-making positions continue to be predominately heterosexual and White, with certainly a couple of exceptions. There’s a tendency to get worried when White or heterosexual people become uncomfortable, but there’s not the same tendency to get worried when racialized or lesbians get uncomfortable. So as a facilitator, if I want to stay employed, there’s a reality sometimes that I have to attend to dominant group’s comfort level, and when they’re shutting down. But to be honest, I have to make sure it doesn’t happen at a point where people who are most vulnerable in the organization are left at risk. So if you’re going to do that, you can’t do it in a way that actually validates that that’s an appropriate call to make, right? So it’s very risky, it’s really risky.

This raises two distinct and competing challenges in this work; ensuring the comfort and approval of privileged employers while leading an anti-oppressive process that working to maintain as “safe” a learning environment.
The feminist educators cited a range of ways that women learners evade acknowledgement of their privilege. I interpreted the stories they shared and grouped the behaviours mentioned into three overarching categories that reflect the ways learners react to being challenged on privileged aspects of their identity, which are: avoidance, denial, and defensiveness. These behaviours are not exclusive to feminist non-credit learning, and may be well known to educators working in a variety of settings.

In the sections that follow, I have provided examples of what each looks like as it emerges in practice. I also contextualized the ways these behaviours arise and are addressed in learning processes by creating a flow chart that integrates the elements of avoidance, denial, and defensiveness into the entire flow of a learning process (See Figure 4. Dynamics of confronting women’s learners privilege in feminist non-credit learning processes). I created this flow chart based on the stories that feminist educators shared with me and on my own experiences as an educator. This chart begins with offensive behaviour(s) enacted by a learner based on a privileged aspect of her identity. This behaviour is the catalyst for an educator or another group member to address, or “call the person on,” the inappropriate behaviour(s). As Figure 4 depicts, these challenges may result in increased awareness for the learner or be met with avoidance, denial or defensiveness, or some combination of these responses. As the process of addressing this behaviour continues, the learner may take up or reject challenges to their behaviour(s) in different ways. The arrows that return to the top of the chart indicate that the process is non-linear, and that learners may cycle back to previous stages in the process. While not all educators viewed inappropriate behaviour(s) as outside the planned learning process, for simplicity I have depicted it as such in this chart.
In all cases I advocate for challenging women learners in ways that value their long term participation in feminist struggles. This entails naming and addressing problematic behaviour in ways that maintain compassion for individuals. Specifically, this involves considering the factors contributing to their offending behaviour, making room to acknowledge their feelings and intentions and considering how the challenge impacts on their self perception (Stone, Patton & Heen, 2000).
*Any of these elements may be in combination

Figure 4. Dynamics of confronting women’s learners privilege in feminist non-credit learning process.
Avoidance

The feminist educators touched on a variety of ways that privilege manifests. I interpreted several of these behaviours as avoidance or as learners’ means of (consciously or subconsciously) avoiding being called on for their oppressive behaviours and beliefs resulting from their privileged aspects of identity.

To begin, the feminist educators noted a few general trends in avoidance. First they noted widespread discomfort that led to avoidance of discussing or addressing issues of difference. For example, Em said (April 24, 2008):

> When we say, “and so what about the experience of women who wear hijab, would they be comfortable in a union meeting or uncomfortable? What about women with (dis)abilities”—you know [...] people start to draw the conclusions and come together, and then when we disrupt that with questions… there’s that tendency to paper over it or say “no, no, I think it’s the same, I’m sure it’s the same!” The universal truths around women… I think there is such a readiness to jump toward that sameness position.

Additionally, the educators noticed that learners often choose to discuss diversity instead of addressing oppression. Em shared (April 24, 2008), “I think amongst our learners there’s a much greater appetite for conversations about diversity than there are about racism or homophobia. Or transphobia.” Em also noted that organizations can have this tendency to avoid taking on oppression and stated (April 24, 2008):

> Diversity is a term that [the organization] likes to use because it’s sort of positive. They like diversity training, they don’t like anti-racism training. They don’t want to deal with sexism or racism or homophobia, [diversity training] is sort of more “positive.” Sometimes “diversity” gets used as that kind of Betty Crocker
feminism: just add women and stir. You don’t have to do anything different at all. It’s a challenge, I think.

Feminist educators also noted several more specific behaviours that I grouped under the theme of avoidance. These behaviours include learners claiming that they have “done their work,” learners calling on the idea of “feeling unsafe” in group learning processes and “racing towards innocence.”

“I have done my work.”

Bezawit noted that many White women who think that they are aware of and have addressed their privilege are not, and have not necessarily. She illustrated this dynamic as she reflected (April 29, 2009):

When you work with a group who think they have done their work. That's what shows up [non-verbals], when you work with a group who says, “I've done this. I've done that.” And I don't doubt it. I'm sure they've done it. And yes, I've been in groups where people have done it because you can see the signs that they have done it. They know exactly what to say and what not to say. However, it doesn't necessarily mean that ... that prevents them from acting out certain kinds of dynamics or behaviours that actually, you know, is coded in a particular way, right. Or you know it's experienced by others in a particular way, right. .. I've had the situation where I've gone into an elevator with an older White woman and she's grabbed her purse, right. [laughs] She doesn't have to call me no name. I know what is going on [laughing], right. And I'm sure she's not thinking about it. She's so used to doing it when she sees a particular person it's an unconscious thing, right.
I believe this happens frequently, and can make it more challenging to work with learners who have participated in anti-oppression or anti-racism trainings and have adopted “politically correct” language while not confronting core values and beliefs. This lack of self awareness creates a difficult situation where an educator would need the learner to see themselves as enacting oppression. As I will explore later in the chapter, undoing a learner’s self construction as innocent is a formidable task for educators in such contexts.

**Misuse of safety.**

The feminist educators all commented on the challenge of learners with privileged social locations who evoke safety in group learning processes for their personal benefit. Specifically, many of the feminist educators spoke about how learners with privileged social locations frequently say they are feeling unsafe as a means to avoid confronting their complicity in the oppressions of others.

To begin this discussion, it is important to understand the centrality of safety within the context of feminist non-credit learning processes. Nina commented (May 5, 2009):

I don't think there's anywhere where safety is not very, very important if not the most important thing to establish. Safety is the most important part, actually. Because if someone doesn't feel safe in a group or if they feel a lack of respect or that the White people are getting treated differently, they won't come back. And that happens constantly in groups.
Roberta also felt that safety was important, but that trying to ensure a “safe space” was a dangerous proposition. She felt that being part of a group process was inherently unsafe. She reflected (June 12, 2009):

Safety is the most critical thing of all in groups, and the fact is that we really can’t create safety. We create assumptions of safety, we create even a dialogue of safety, but we actually can’t create safety within a group, I think. I think going into a group in general is an unsafe act. To actually participate there’s unsafety, there’s vulnerability that comes within that.

Tina echoed this (July 3, 2009) and commented that she sees safety as an artificial promise in groups:

I don’t think there’s any session that ought to be held to a standard of having everybody feel safe because I think it’s bullshit. You know, we’re not all the same, and there are different risks to different ones of us, depending on what’s at stake in the room. But I’m suspicious of the word; it’s a four-letter word that makes me cringe.

These strong reactions around the notion of “safe space” signal contention around the notion of safety. Tina contended that safety came to be misused by women with privilege as a means of avoidance. She stated (July 3, 2009):

There’s been a lot of hype in women’s organizations about safety. It emerged out of a legitimate need, I guess, as women were carving out spaces for themselves to talk about sexism without having to explain it or justify it, and I guess in reaction to the sexism in courts and police forces, etc, right? There’s a need for a place where women’s experience could be accepted and not questioned and dismissed and diminished. Unfortunately, it’s also started to be used as a stick or a tool for silencing, so that women could avoid difficult, uncomfortable, legitimate
discussions which held them accountable for their behaviour through this word, by saying they don’t feel safe.

To illustrate this phenomenon, Brenda recalled (January 30, 2009) a consciousness-raising process she led with women, saying:

I remember that there was this White woman sitting on the floor and then there were about 30, 35, all women there. And again it was mostly White women but there were a fair number of Black women in the group and probably some other women of colour and so we started with group agreements, which is pretty standard. As facilitators we asked, “What group agreements would you like?” and this woman raises her hand and says, “I want an agreement that says I have the right to leave the room when I'm feeling unsafe.” This is the first offering. So a Black woman raises her hand and says, “Well, what the hell would you feel unsafe about? Do I make you feel unsafe?” That happened immediately. There we were, we had just started, and so we had to challenge this woman like, “Do you feel unsafe? What is making you feel unsafe? What is going on here?”

In this example, a woman with White skin privilege is evoking issues of safety, creating resentment, tension and division within the group, which can test an educator’s ability. However, it is important for an educator to consider other reasons why this participant may anticipate feeling unsafe and make a judgement call about how to respond. It is possible that she is a sexual assault survivor, or survivor of other types of violence, and that this makes her feel unsafe in situations that seem benign to others. Given that this situation occurred during a train-the-trainer program, the facilitator may choose to open up the conversation at this point, and invite the participants to consider the potential needs of women in the groups they will lead themselves. This approach can offer new perspectives for learners while directing the attention away from the woman being interrogated about why she feels unsafe.
Bezawit also described an incident where a learner appealed to the idea of “feeling unsafe” when she was challenged. She recounted (April 29, 2009):

Oftentimes someone would say something that might be homophobic, make a comment about somebody who’s a lesbian or who’s Trans or made a comment about someone of another race or of another ethnicity. The person who made that comment might not take it very well and that person might then turn around and say, “Oh no, you just made me unsafe, just the way you responded to that.”

While women with privileged aspects of identity say they do not feel safe, other, more marginalized, women do not see the same situation as unsafe. This discrepancy in what is deemed safe also highlights an important lesson about the intersecting nature of identity and experiences. As Bezawit said (April 29, 2009):

I think it's important to have safety but I don't think safety means the same for everybody. And that does not mean that safety should not exist in a group. For instance, safety for women of colour, or for lesbians, or for women with (dis)abilities means something different for those who don't share that life aspect.

This illustrates how women’s different social locations and relative systemic powers are being enacted. As Bezawit noted (May 9, 2008), “creating a safe group, it’s not a blanket thing. That we have to understand that … there is differences in terms of how safety intersects.”

I also see “safe space” as unachievable. Rather, I think of it as a goal to constantly strive for, knowing that safety is different for everyone. I also think the notion of “safe space” can infantilize participants and set up a dynamic wherein it is the educator’s responsibility to take care of participants. In contrast, it is valuable to recognize safety is actively created through mutual trust and invite participants to engage in a space of working and taking risks. In any case I support the collective exploration of the concept of safe space in group learning processes. I
believe this concept is valuable because it raises the issue of how our behaviour impacts one another and provides the opportunity for dialogue about difference, which I will discuss further in Chapter Five.

“Racing towards innocence.”

The final example of avoidance that feminist educators discussed is a phenomenon where learners refuse to acknowledge that they exercise any privilege. In this dynamic, a learner with privilege identifies more, or even exclusively, with aspects of her identity that are marginalized within society. This makes it difficult for feminist educators to encourage learners to acknowledge or address their privilege.

Sherene Razack and Mary Louis Fellows (1998) call abdicating responsibility for one’s privileged social locations “racing towards innocence.” Racing towards innocence is the “process through which a woman comes to believe her own subordination is the most urgent and that she is unimplicated in the subordination of other women” (p. 335). The act of denying one’s privilege is harmful to more marginalized individuals and hinders the opportunities for learning across difference. As Razack and Fellows (1998) note:

When we view ourselves as innocent, we cannot confront the hierarchies that operate among us. Instead each women claims her own marginality is the worst one; failing to interrogate her complicity in other women’s lives, she continues to participate in the practices that oppress other women.

As an example, Nina reflected on how middle-class privilege was rejected by those who had experienced violence in their race towards innocence. She said (November 12, 2009):
middle class people who have experienced violence, can make it - especially if your reaction to that or the way that you’ve come to see yourself, is as a victim - very, very difficult to understand yourself as someone with power.

Similarly, Bezawit noted that White learners deflect responsibility for their privilege based on their socio-economic marginalization. She stated (January 30, 2009):

They don't see that they benefit from Whiteness. It's more invisible than the other things. The other things they can work through in a way that is actually much more workable. And it becomes less dramatic, right, but when it comes to get challenged on Whiteness that's when it happens because these women don't see themselves as benefitting from Whiteness. Because they're working class, they're poor. They're marginalized and they're going to [say] – “fuck that shit.” And that then gets women of colour upset because they think like... yeah, [laughs] you know. So that's why it becomes such a volatile issue. And I think it is much more volatile with women who have a lot more oppressions in their lives because they don't understand how I could be oppressed. “You tell me that I am White privileged, like what the fuck are you talking about?”

For educators and learners alike, taking responsibility for privilege is a daunting task. The frustrations I felt while hearing the educators tell stories of learners’ avoidance were palpable. The issue of avoidance points to one of the major challenges of working across difference. If a learner is not willing to acknowledge her privilege, she cannot begin to embrace all facets of her identity, or those of others. Learners who cannot acknowledge their own privileges also cannot begin to understand the ways in which their social locations are constructed in relation to others. Likewise, they cannot begin to see the interlocking nature of social locations. It challenges an educator’s very purpose when learners refuse to recognize or accept different interpretations of their social locations and relative privilege from others in the group.
Feminist educators spoke about how, for learners, this acknowledgement can be very challenging. As Sam noted (August 10, 2009), “it does feel like women that we’ve been providing the training with, are holding onto something extremely tight [re: their experience of (dis)ability].” Brenda also reflected on this idea as she noted that the women with whom she worked “were holding onto this oppression as sacrosanct. And it could not shift, it was like something that if they were to let go of it in any way, their whole identity would collapse” (Brenda, August 10, 2009). Sam shed light on one of the ways in which women’s “race to innocence” may in fact be reinforced. She noticed in learning processes that “people go, ‘so if I’m privileged, then I’m not entitled [to fight for rights], so I actually don’t want to acknowledge that I’m privileged’” (Sam, May 4, 2009).

Among all other anecdotes, Sam’s captures me. I have frequently observed women in activist communities retreat through a race towards innocence. The extent to which this happens makes me wonder if naming and addressing this manoeuvre might do more for progressing social justice than any other strategy or tactic combined. It is critical to deal with this, as most learners will be privileged in some way. As Alma noted (June 11, 2009), “I think it's very hard to find someone in the room that is a person of colour, a woman, with (dis)abilities, a lesbian, you know, homeless, no education, or no privilege in anything.”

**Defensiveness**

Defensiveness was another major topic that educators brought up that falls within the theme of acknowledging and addressing privilege. Defensiveness refers to “prepared to resist attack; answering back to what one interprets as criticism” (Cayne, 1988). I identified two
behaviours that the feminist educators spoke about that fall under defensiveness: crying and "rescuing."

*Crying.*

Bezawit commented extensively on how White women cry as a defence against confronting their privilege during processes of group consciousness-raising. She noted (November 12, 2009):

White women cry in the group, this is a big, big thing, and crying when they are challenged. It’s not crying because you have a problem, that’s a different thing. It’s resistance, defensiveness.

Bezawit illustrated (January 30, 2009) one such experience, recalling the words of a privileged White and middle-class woman learner who began to cry during a session:

“You know, I really want to apologize. I knew that what I said was totally inappropriate and I want to apologize.” And I knew that - but she had to cry and I said, “You know I have to take you up on the crying because quite frankly, you crying, what are you asking of me when you cry? That I feel sorry? That I feel empathy? I take care of you? I'm not going to do any of those things.”

In her thesis entitled *Facing Race, Saving Face: Anti-Racism, Emotion and Knowledge in Social Movement Organizations*, Sarita Srivastava (2002) writes about how White women personalize issues and cry during group organizational change processes as a means to avoid implementing anti-racism policies. I agree that when privileged women cry during anti-oppression processes, the discussion remains stalled at the level of personal experience. It is true that crying often blocks processes from moving to a more substantive look at the systemic
implications of such a reaction, or from moving forward to strategize for social change. In the case of crying in group consciousness-raising processes, the personal rarely becomes political.

“Rescuing.”

“Rescuing” was another behaviour described by the feminist educators that I attribute to defensiveness. “Rescuing” takes place in three stages. First, a woman exhibits a verbal or non-verbal behaviour that exercises her privilege during the learning process and, in doing so, causes harm to other learners. Following this, the learner is called on her behaviour, either by the educator or another learner. This is followed by another learner in the group jumping in to justify or minimize the oppressive behaviour and defending or “rescuing” her. Bezawit illustrated “rescuing” as she reported (November 12, 2009):

That happens a lot in group. Rescuing, I see as defensiveness. When people rescue, they are defending a belief and a value that they themselves carry. It is a protecting of something that they also agree with. What happens in the group a lot is if a challenge happens, there’s always someone who rushes to defend the person who said the inappropriate comment and got challenged, because they felt like, “oh, you are ganging up on this person. Oh, I have to rescue that person because that poor person has - you know, she’s embarrassed herself, right, she’s exposed herself. But in exposing herself, she’s also kind of exposing others, like me.”

However, “rescuing” is not limited to learners with privileged aspects of identity rescuing one another. In some cases, learners with more marginalized aspects of identity also feel called on to play the role of “rescuer.” Tina explained (July 3, 2009) this dynamic in the context of the workplace organizational change processes she leads:
The only times I’ve seen people who are marginal become uncomfortable is when they feel the need to rescue the senior people in the organization because they’re afraid of the backlash to them, or because that’s how they get rewarded. So I’ve seen that, where they’ll step up or they’ll speak up in order to publicly rescue the dominant group in ways that they hope will set them apart from the trouble-making facilitator and/or other participants… “I love working here, you’re good people, it’s always fair... I’m uncomfortable with this, I’ve never experienced racism in Canada.”

I also see rescuing as problematic because it sets up learners to take sides; those who feel the women learner in question made an offending comment or exhibited an offensive behaviour and those who defend her behaviour. Once learners have taken sides individuals may be influenced by group pressure. This group pressure will make it more difficult for learners to shift in their thinking, out of fear of possible reprisal from their colleagues. This could then result in an increase in the defensiveness exhibited by a greater number of women in the group when subsequent contentious issues arise.

The dynamic of rescuing can also mean that an entire group take sides against an educator who calls a learner on her inappropriate behaviour. I believe this risk keeps many educators from raising challenges in the first place.

Denial

Within the theme of acknowledging and addressing privilege the feminist educators noted learners’ reactions can extend beyond avoidance of, or defensiveness about, their privilege and move into denying privilege exists. Denial is defined as “a refusal to acknowledge, disavowal”
(Cayne, 1988). Nina observed (November 12, 2009) how denial took place through claims of “reverse racism” with socio-economically disadvantaged White women:

Especially if she lives in one of the priority neighbourhoods, often she’s actually a minority within the two blocks that she lives in, in terms of having White skin. I’ve had White, working class and poor women who [say] I have experienced racism, right, because they are one of the small number of White families in a neighbourhood. Trying to get them to understand that no, no, that [reverse racism] is not what you’re experiencing, has been the biggest challenge, I find.

I think this misunderstanding of systemic oppression can be common. The White women in this example may be experiencing alienation, but, because she is not a woman of colour, this experience cannot be called racism. In fact, she is likely experiencing alienation based on having more systemic privilege than others in her neighbourhood.

This kind of denial keeps learners from recognizing the nature of the privileges they possess, in a manner very similar to “racing towards innocence.”

**Learners Leaving the Group**

**Shutting Down**

Many of the feminist educators I spoke to found that just naming learners’ privilege caused learners to shut down or emotionally withdraw from further participation. This made the prospect of raising issues related to identity a challenge to begin with. Sam reflected (May 4, 2009):

For some of the women in the group that I work with, if I actually said [to them], like, “So and so, you know, as a White woman who has a job” All of those things
would shift her perspective about her place of disadvantage. I think she would shut down.

Mika also noted that drawing attention to learners’ behaviours based on their privileged aspects of identity that hurt others in the group was difficult. She said (April 20, 2009), “you have to be really careful... just because it happened in the space doesn’t mean that, you know, it’s a free for all to call people out... Sometimes that can close them off for dialogue."

While calling participants on their behaviour can cause them to shut down, I think it is also a case of timing and delivery. If a challenge is done fairly and sensitively, I think it is possible for withdrawal to be a momentary state in some cases. As a learner who benefits from some time to think about things, I may have appeared to shut down in learning spaces when I needed time to process. The challenge to educators in these moments is ascertaining what is going on for learners and gauging how to respond.

**Learners Physically Leaving**

Several of the feminist educators mentioned the option of asking privileged learners who caused harm in the group to physically leave when it did not seem possible to address their inappropriate behaviours. However, the educators saw this as a dilemma as well as a challenge. Several educators hesitated to ask such learners to leave because they found it difficult to discern if they were committed and could benefit from participating in the learning process. Alma recounted such a dilemma at a time when a learner was making racist comments (June 11, 2009):

[Raising the issue] went okay and then it came up again. And then people walked out, right? And so in hindsight, maybe what I should have asked was for her to leave. But you never know whether she's going to be okay. By the looks of it she
said she was fine and then she said it again and then of course the whole group by now... Like, “this is it,” right?

Sam echoed this hesitation, leaning towards allowing offensive learners to stay in the group to work through their issues. She reflected (May 4, 2009):

There have been times I’ve really wanted to say that [you should leave the group]. And I think why I resist is because, in terms of the work that I do around (dis)ability, it’s like so not sexy... if I’ve got you here, I’m going to keep you here, as long as I can. And maybe it’s a disservice to everybody else to keep that person there, because it’s more of a distraction for them, or, it’s really affecting the way that people get to learn this material when they’re dealing with somebody who just really is not open. I figure if they’re challenged enough they’re going to leave anyway. I’d rather that they leave. But I think one of the places that feels difficult for me is that I don’t know if [they’re] committed to this. I just don’t know whether it’s [they’re] are so confronted that it isn’t about commitment, it’s about something else. And so I appreciate if someone can actually just sort of name it. But I don’t know whether it’s that obvious, sometimes.

Mika on the other hand did not hesitate about asking learners to leave, and she felt strongly that in some cases it was necessary. She shared (March 24, 2009):

If people want to get up and leave, they get up and leave. I don't care that they're sitting and looking at me because I'll say right to their face, “What are you doing here if you're not participating?” I have no problem. I don't know if that's a generational difference.

I understand why it is hard to ask a learner to leave the group. As an educator, I also hope that in time such a learner will have a revelation and be able to make great contributions to other group members’ learning. I also can understand an educator’s fear in terms of the retribution from the group, or their employer.
Challenging Privilege Needs to be a Continuous Process

Once a learner has accepted a challenge to her behaviour or attitude, it does not mean that she has worked through her privilege and the learning is done. The arrows in Figure 4 that flow back up to previous stages in the process illustrate what Bezawit pointed out (April 29, 2009):

The fact that we've worked through our stuff doesn't mean shit doesn't happen. Okay and to me that's you know, that's a self-righteousness approach to think that because we have worked through our process, that we're still not going to have issues around racism, we're still not going to have issues around, you know, inappropriate dynamics, right. We are still going to because it's not necessarily what you say, right, it's also the dynamics... and the way in which we interact in particular ways and particular contexts, and the kinds of dynamics women bring.

Tina also mentioned (July 3, 2009) that employers need to be challenged as a result of their privilege. She noted:

There’s a point at which [privileged people’s discomfort] can be used to circumvent some important moments and because it’s people with decision-making power they can turn their discomfort into questioning the competency of the facilitator or the neutrality of the facilitator.

This is a difficult situation for an educator to navigate with her employer. The educator’s fear of her employer’s reprisal can create a chill effect influencing the degree to which she will challenge learners in their processes. As I see it this chill effect would correspondingly limit the degree to which consciousness was raised during the learning process.
The damaging behaviours enacted by learners with privilege also affect feminist educators at a personal level, albeit differentially based on the marginalized aspects of an educator’s identity. Bezawit recounted how she was perceived by participants (April 29, 2009):

I worked with [Brenda]. It was always assumed that [Brenda] was the expert and I was the student, when in fact it was the other way around and [Brenda] had to keep telling people that. But what that was is because of how I was marked. If I was another White woman, there would not be that confusion, there would not be that way of always seeing me as the person who is not the one who’s the expert, but the Other, the learner. Always the learner, not the expert.

Hearing these stories raised a complication that educators did not address, but which was evident; working in consciousness-raising processes with differently-located women can be constantly triggering for an educator. The more marginalized aspects of identity that an educator experiences, the greater likelihood that the educator will be triggered, harmed or traumatized as a result of the offensive behaviours learners with privileged social locations exhibit. However, educators who experience marginalized aspects of identity have greater potential for keen analysis of issues of identity and oppression that they can then evoke and share with the women learners in their processes. This dynamic truly makes the work of facilitating such processes a double edged sword.

**Improper Challenging as a Barrier**

While challenging does need to be part of a continuous process it is critical to note that challenging is only helpful if it is done correctly, well or fairly. When challenges are done
improperly or poorly\textsuperscript{25} they become another barrier to learning. As an example, incorrect or unfair challenges can happen when educator or learners challenge one another based on being triggered by past incidents and not by what is actually taking place in the learning space. This results in challenges that are misdirected anger.

Other barriers are presented when a learner improperly directs challenges. In this case, the educator is faced with the difficult task of having to confront the learner who levelled the challenge and correct her on the way that she approached challenging. This results in anger and resentment on the part of the learner who directed the challenge. In addition, the learner who was challenged improperly may subsequently behave in a way that actually requires challenging and the educator would then have to challenge this behaviour. Either case may result in confusion for learners about when challenges are appropriate and deter them from naming their own experiences and challenging one another in the future. This confusion may, in turn, produce a chill effect around challenging for fear of reprisal from the educator.

Interestingly, none of the feminist educators mentioned that improper challenges present a barrier to learning. One of the reasons for this may be because, as mentioned, women with social locations of privilege have commonly looked to find fault with how issues are raised, and used this as a way to avoid being challenged. Another possible reason is that the educators were reticent to admit they may not be effective in their roles. Most, if not all, of the feminist educators felt challenging was a good idea; yet I suspect many were unsure if they themselves were challenging learners’ inappropriate behaviour in an effective way. This occurs to me because, throughout the interviews and focus groups, only one educator pointedly said she was

\textsuperscript{25} For a further discuss of what constitutes a good use of challenges please refer to Chapter Seven, which covers my reflections on successful pedagogies and practices.
not sure how to challenge learners in a good/productive way and most others expressed hesitation about challenging. I don’t think this hesitation was only about the fear of reprisal or “push back” from learners with privileged social locations. I think the hesitation also stemmed from the fact that many did not feel confident about going on the record and outlining how challenging should be carried out.

Finally, the educators may not have mentioned that challenging can create a barrier to learning because they may not have thought I would understand the distinction between improper challenges and avoidance of challenges, and wanted to ensure I would stress their criticism of the avoidance tactics of women with privileged social locations.

**Educators’ Identity as a Barrier to Taking up Issues**

The educators’ comments revealed interesting connections between the role of identity and barriers in the learning process. These educators’ reflections on identity suggest to me that the social locations an educators’ embodies affect and create barriers around what they are able to address and accomplish in consciousness-raising around issues of power and identity with women learners.

Through analysing educator’s comments I observed that their experiences of themselves and their learners’ perceptions of them affected the ways in which they conducted their learning processes. In the following section, I describe how the educators’ social locations limited what issues and facets of identity they were comfortable exploring through their learning processes.
In one example, Tina spoke about the limitations of her own social locations. In particular, she spoke about her uneasiness in raising LGBTQ issues as a straight woman. She recounted (July 3, 2009):

I try to be very careful because as a heterosexual person I feel like I should be taking direction from gay and lesbian and bisexual people, transgender, transsexual, etc. But it absolutely does come up. And it’s important that it comes up. And like I say, I find it difficult work to do, and I’m trying to be as respectful and careful as I can, not to impose the questions that come up from me as a heterosexual person on people from those communities about how to then talk about it.

While I understand her caution about potentially imposing a heterosexist or normative lens on LGBTQ issues I also see that the need to be careful can also prevent educators from adequately broaching such topics.

Similarly, Nina mentioned how her locations influence her comfort in bringing up different issues of identity. Nina mentioned that she was more confident to speak about oppressions she faces than oppression she benefits from as a White woman. She related her experiences of challenging issues of race (May 5, 2009):

I’m speaking as a person of privilege who has [race] privilege. So it may be that my confidence in speaking about that is a little bit less than my confidence about speaking to the other issue(s). If I’m talking about racism I know that I’m anticipating more resistance than when I’m talking about sexism.

To further this point, Nina mentioned that she is comfortable, yet cautious, when speaking about oppressions she faces. She said (May 5, 2009):
I will come out pretty early and I will talk about homophobia, but I think I am more mindful of it, “Am I putting overemphasis on homophobia?” You know, I don’t want to give the impression. So I do try to talk about myself from a variety of aspects of self… I think I'm most confident talking about the experiences of oppression from those places where I feel I experience oppression.

Based on the fact that she is a woman with a (dis)ability, Sam echoed this view as she said (May 4, 2009), “When I’m talking to people about (dis)ability I think it gets heard differently when it’s from me than it would be from someone who’s my non-(dis)abled ally.” She also mentioned (May 4, 2009):

Me, I’m just bitter, a bitter lesbian. If it’s around some aspect of identity that [I] have, if [I] challenge people around that, [I] don’t think they’re going to hear [me]...They will hear me, but they will see me as being skewed.

Here again I understand the need to keep a learning process from turning into an exploration of aspects of marginalization that affected the educator personally. However, I also see how not wanting to skew the learning process could cause educators to shy away from naming and addressing aspects of marginalization they face.

Furthermore, Nina mentioned that speaking from an identity of privilege was also challenging. She reflected (May 5, 2009):

Speaking from privilege is definitely harder. It's more challenging and I feel like the ground under me just getting a little shakier... I don't know, it's like a feeling that I have that, “Oh, I don't feel on such solid ground right at the moment, but I'll plough ahead and see what I can do.”

This commentary suggests that the educators’ bodies and social locations shape the themes available for exploration, and the ways in which these themes are explored. The
educators’ comments also suggest to me that educators feel constrained in myriad ways based on how they are perceived as a result of their social locations. As they expressed it, there are few aspects of identity they can authoritatively take up due to their discomfort in addressing aspects of oppression they do not share, as well as being uncomfortable about being perceived to overly focus on social locations of oppression they do face and feeling trepidation about speaking from aspects of privilege.

The educators expressed most comfort in talking about aspects of their marginalization (while not speaking about these aspects too much) while simultaneously retreating from speaking from their social locations of privilege. This suggests the same “racing towards innocence” behaviour that educators identified as a challenging behaviour learners exhibited.

As well, it is interesting to note that the educators did not state any discomfort or hesitating about addressing social locations of privilege which they do not share within their learning processes. In fact, this was the only aspect of identity that educators did not say they felt uncomfortable in addressing. This finding may account for the fact that addressing privileges, and specifically aspects of privilege they did not face, such as those of White middle-class women was the focus of many educators’ comments throughout this research.

Conclusion

In considering the barriers and challenges that the feminist educators addressed, it is interesting to explore how this knowledge took shape. Specifically, I ponder the extent to which both White feminist educators and feminist educators of colour participating in this research raised the need to address privilege. While I did not explicitly identify myself as White in the
research process, I feel that my identity in this regard is self-evident. It was apparent that feminist educators saw me this way as well, when they made references such as, “you as White women” (Bezawit, May 9, 2008).

My race is noteworthy, considering the number of comments I heard about White/privileged learners alongside remarks such as:

It was “few and far between,” but sometime White/privileged participants were defensive and uncomfortable - “I don’t want to be here, because I don’t want to do this. And I feel like you are pushing me to do something what I don’t want to do” [my emphasis].

This gives me cause to reflect. If the defensiveness of White/privileged learners was in fact “few and far between,” why did I hear about this phenomenon so often? I have also contemplated Alma’s words (March 6, 2908):

I really believe that my purpose in life - and everybody’s, in everyone I meet - there’s a certain something that I’m supposed to be doing with that person. And so for me, for example, when we meet, […] as we’re talking, then I try to figure that out.

Were stories about White/privileged social locations what learners determined I needed to hear, rather than the range of challenges they actually faced? I wonder if participating in this research process was in part a means for feminist educators to educate me, as much as it was to contribute generally to what is known about raising consciousness with women learners about identity, difference and power.

I felt at times that I was being cautioned generally as a feminist educator about practices that I should not replicate. In other moments, I felt that I was being warned about what not to do
as a White women learner or feminist educator as much as being given guidance as a researcher. In still other moments, I felt as though I was being treated as a messenger for other White people (who are arguably the general audience of academic writing). Or perhaps I was just ruminating on this because I am White and experience guilt.

It also occurred to me that the educators’ reflections may raise the theme of privilege because they find it easy/uncomplicated to take up privileges that they do not face. Regardless of the motivation behind the stories, the barriers and challenges facing feminist educators are important to understand as context for what work is required to encourage women to develop an intersectional/interlocking understanding of their social locations.
CHAPTER FIVE:
EDUCATORS’ IDEAS ON INTERSECTIONALITY AND INTERLOCKING IDENTITIES, AND HOW THESE CONCEPTS ARE EXPRESSED IN PRACTICE

Introduction

The feminist educators participating in this research provided many examples of the barriers and challenges they face, as described in Chapter Four. These educators also had many ideas for approaches and practices for addressing issues of identity, power, privilege and oppression while working with differently-located women. These ideas and approaches were informed by a variety of sources, and in most cases educators did not discuss their practices using the terminology of intersectionality and interlocking identities.

In this chapter, I discuss what feminist educators considered successful practices, particularly in relation to attending to women’s multiple differences. I then consider how these educators’ practices resonated with, or showed an awareness of, the concepts reflected in intersectionality and interlocking oppressions frameworks.

General Practices That Feminist Educators Employed in Their Work

Throughout the interviews, the feminist educators discussed several general practices involved in designing and facilitating learning processes, which could apply to any facilitation context. In terms of setting up the learning process, educators found it was helpful to have two co-facilitators. They also noted that it was ideal to have chairs for the learners arranged in a circle, since sitting around tables inhibits group interactions.

The educators also had general tips for encouraging learners’ participation. During the learning process, the use of smaller working groups was suggested for various exercises if the
whole group was larger than 10 participants. The educators found this effective for processing information, generating ideas, helping learners to connect within the group, and encouraging quieter learners to participate. For determining small group configurations, the educators recommended that learners determine their own small groups the first time they formed subgroup or when small groups were used to further explore difficult topics. In order to mix groups up later in the process, the educators arbitrarily counted off learners or drew names. Finally, the educators mentioned that it was helpful to begin with activities to break the ice in order to develop a level of comfort and trust in the group.

While these general practices are instructive, within this chapter I am looking specifically at practices that illuminate the ways in which the power differences among women were taken up by feminist educators. Given that academic attention to intersectionality and interlocking identities came after these issues were faced by communities, I consider: How are these concepts being taken up by educators now? Which aspects are relevant?

**Central Questions**

As mentioned in Chapter Two my analysis in this chapter addresses two central questions: 1) how do the concepts of intersecting and interlocking identities make sense to feminist educators? and 2) how do the concepts of intersectionality and interlocking identities resonate within feminist non-credit learning processes?

Based on my review of the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and interlocking identities (see Chapter One) and my own practice as an educator, I looked for a range of ways in which these concepts were enacted in pedagogies and practices. Specifically, I looked for the
recognition of elements of intersectionality in the feminist educators' praxes, which included an understanding that:

1) Identity is made up of multiple social locations or identities (Crenshaw, 1989)
2) All facets of identity are separate, yet joined simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1989)
3) Multiple oppressions are compounding in nature. The more identities of oppression one occupies - considering the barriers of racism, sexism, heteronormativity, classism (among others) - the more difficult it will be to cross the intersection, or exist free of impediment (Crenshaw, 1989)
4) Power differentials are associated with different aspects of identity (Hill-Collins, 1990)
5) Power differentials are based on systemic processes, as expressed through Hill-Collins (1990) Matrix of Domination

Similarly, I looked at these educators' practices for elements that displayed an awareness of the ideas behind interlocking identities. As mentioned in Chapter One, the term “interlocking identities” refers to the ways that one comes to know him or herself through the Other. Or, as Sarah Ahmed (2000) conceptualized, individuals construct themselves based on what they are not, which is established through contact with the Other. In this chapter, I look for understanding and practices that resonate with the following components of an interlocking identities framework:

1) Interlocking oppression accounts for how race, class, gender (as well as other identities) co-constitute one another in ways that cannot be separated in White supremacist capitalist patriarchy (Razack & Fellows, 1998)
2) Systems of oppression come into existence in and through one another (Razack & Fellows, 1998)

Without a doubt, all of the educators were very aware that women’s different social locations and experiences play a role in learning contexts. Significantly, they only explicitly mentioned intersectional and interlocking identities frameworks in a few instances. Yet the educators' ideas and practices resonated with the concepts of intersectional and interlocking identities in many ways. In this chapter, I return to and expand upon my earlier definitions of
intersectionality and interlocking identities as I explore the ways in which the feminist educators’ practices resonated with these concepts.

Organization of This Chapter

This chapter is organized into two main sections that explore intersectionality and interlocking identities and the ways that the educators’ ideas and praxis that are the subject of these theoretical frameworks. Within the sections dedicated to educators’ ideas, I investigate the ways in which the feminist educators’ analysis resonated with the academic work on intersectionality and interlocking identities. I did not specifically ask them to discuss these concepts, but was looking for the ways in which they might show an awareness of these concepts. The result is a description of how ideas related to these concepts make sense to feminist educators.

In the sections dedicated to praxis, I explore the processes and/or activities that the feminist educators facilitated with women learners in their groups and considered how these practices resonated with intersectionality and interlocking identities frameworks. In many cases, the feminist educators do not espouse theories of intersectionality or interlocking identities, or cite these ideas as informing their praxis. However, I found that many educators had an embodied understanding and appreciation of ideas related to intersectionality and interlocking identities and were able to engage women in learning processes that reflected this knowledge.

My reflections in this chapter were informed by my analysis of the concepts and practices that the feminist educators shared with me, my prior practice as an educator, and my familiarity with consciousness-raising, as well as adult and popular education praxis. For example, Figure 5.
Ways adults learn, taken from the popular education canon *Educating for a Change* (Arnold et al, 1991), demonstrates that the more learners use their senses and can apply what they are learning the more they retain what is taught.

![Diagram of Ways adults learn.](image)

Figure 5. Ways adults learn.

All of the feminist educators articulated thoughts that resonated with intersectionality and interlocking identities and conveyed the importance of these frameworks. Many also reflected on the role that their social locations play in their lives and work as educators or described anti-oppression frameworks they presented to women in their groups. However, in many cases, the feminist educators had difficulty conveying what they actually did in groups to meaningfully raise women’s consciousness around issues of difference, power, privilege or oppression.

I believe thoughtful reflection on ideas or frameworks related to identity and power coupled with action is what makes for successful practice, irrespective of whether one is conversant in the theoretical concepts of intersectionality and interlocking oppressions. As a result, through this dissertation I am emphasizing the feminist educators' articulation of praxes
that enable learners to understand the relevance of the complex nature of oppression and difference in their own lives.

**Intersectionality**

During the interviews, I worked with a definition of intersectionality that encompasses the following elements:

1) Identity is made up of multiple social locations, or identities (Crenshaw, 1989)
2) All facets of identity are separate, yet joined simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1989)
3) Multiple oppressions are compounding in nature. The more identities of oppression one occupies - considering the barriers of racism, sexism, heteronormativity, classism (among others) - the more difficult it will be to cross the intersection, or exist free of impediment (Crenshaw, 1989)
4) Power differentials are associated with different aspects of identity (Hill-Collins, 1990)
5) Power differentials are based on systemic processes, as expressed through Hill-Collins (1990) Matrix of Domination

In this section, I reflect on the educators’ ideas about these concepts and their practices that draw on the framework of intersectionality.

**Educators’ Ideas that Resonate with Intersectionality**

In most cases, the educators did not mention the term “intersectionality” or “interlocking identities” when I asked them about successful learning pedagogies. However, the educators revealed their awareness of ideas conveyed in these frameworks through the ways in which they spoke about social locations and identity. In this section, I describe ideas that resonate with intersectionality that feminist educators were thinking about and that they found meaningful in their work.
All of the feminist educators demonstrated an understanding that identity is made up of multiple social locations or identities (Crenshaw, 1989). This mostly emerged through the practices that they recounted, which I examine in the next section. In terms of ideas related to intersectionality, none of the educators spoke about the need to name or address aspects of identity in learning processes. This is likely because educators were screened for this perspective, so we already had a shared understanding.

Tina noted the importance of an intersectional understanding and of learners embracing this before entering her processes for organizational change. She said (May 6, 2008):

I think a fundamental condition is that whole conversation about how we have both privilege and are targets of discrimination, depending on what our full identities are and be able to... understand how that shapes moment to moment what’s going on.

I also agree that adopting an intersectional perspective is crucial in understanding one’s identity and those of others. While it would be ideal for learners to have a grasp on this framework before entering group processes, fostering this understanding is the ongoing work of educators in consciousness-raising processes. The Popular Education Spiral (see Figure 6.) illustrates that educators should find a starting point based on their participants' existing knowledge, which by most accounts rarely includes a complex understanding of difference, power and oppression.
Several educators related that the starting point for many learners is to focus on one aspect of oppression over another. This reflects the idea that identity is made up of multiple social locations or identities (Crenshaw, 1989), but further discussion may reveal that something more complicated is going on with other interlocking aspects of oppression. For example, Roberta noted that participants would speak about race, but not recognize how class plays out in their experience when coupled with race (January 23, 2009). Tina also spoke about how women in her organizational change processes gravitated towards examining access and equity based on gender and ability, while shying away from taking on race and heteronormativity (July 3, 2009). As Tina reflected, this was not so much a “race towards innocence,” but a “race to be done” with the conversation (July 3, 2009). That said it was clear from the educators' reflections that learners struggled and took longer to make connections around oppressions they had not personally suffered from and were uncomfortable during learning processes because addressing these issues brought up pain or shame.

**Figure 6. Popular education spiral.**
According to Tina, this is connected to the way that women deal with power. She said (May 6, 2008):

There’s a whole level of talking about power and the way in which we envy each other, we deny each other. We try to have [power] without seeming to have it. That could also happen among women without looking at issues of power and difference that comes with the body that we’re in.

I tend to agree that women have difficulty having and exercising power without reproducing the very hierarchical and patriarchal patterns they wish to avoid. I also see that this misuse of power creates divisions between women. Due to this dynamic, I could imagine starting learning processes by naming and working with how power is conceived and exercised in the group either before or at the same time as frameworks such as intersectionality are introduced.

When talking about identity, many feminist educators reflected a more straightforward portrayal of the idea that identity is made up of multiple social locations or identities (Crenshaw, 1989). This occurred through their naming of different personal characteristics, such as level of education, job description and salary levels (Tina, May 6, 2008) and length of time with an organization and informal networks and connections (Nina, April 13, 2009). These personal descriptors extend beyond those usually associated with power and difference, complicating the characteristics that can be considered when thinking about all the points that converge within one's intersecting identities.

The educators also called for “a more complicated conversation [which] is intersectionality, about how all these things intersect” (Nina, May 2, 2009). Their recognition of the need for such a conversation demonstrated their understanding that all facets of identity are simultaneously separate and joined (Crenshaw, 1989). As Roberta noted (June 12, 2009), “a
gender analysis without a race analysis doesn’t make sense to me. All the rest [of one’s identities] are tied together also, depending on what you’re experiencing in your location.”

Em and Viv also spoke about how the interconnected nature of intersectionality was critical in their learning environments. Em reflected (April 24, 2009), “we’re really clear that a women’s activist, or a feminist, trade union feminist, has to be concerned with gender and race, and sexual orientation... That you can’t just pick one.” While this may be true, I also have surmised from my practice and other feminist educators’ responses that this emphasis on the simultaneity of oppressions is difficult to sustain, and a climate of trust that encourages vulnerability must be fostered in order for any of this learning to be possible.

Finally, I inferred Roberta’s thoughts about how power differentials are associated with different aspects of identity. This arose when she made an interesting comment about how she can feel triggered based on what is raised in the group and her intersectional identities. She shared (June 12, 2009):

If somebody’s talking about their experience of childhood poverty in the group [saying], “You know, when I was a kid, back home, we didn’t have any food. I had to wear one uniform all the time, and kids laughed at me. And this is why I continue to not feel good about myself, and I continued to be in bad relationships.”

Now I’m also dealing with my own take on it, based on my own working class background. So you sometimes deal with your own shit, like really quickly. You have to be constantly doing your own work outside of the group, so that when you hear that, you’re not being triggered. Or if you’re being triggered, you know how to deal with that. So that you won’t become defensive of this woman’s experience, or shut her down depending on where you’re at in your work.
This reflection reveals Roberta’s awareness of the power dynamics at play during the group process. At the same time it raises an important point about the personal processes an educator must undergo in order to be able to successfully facilitate consciousness-raising processes with women that touch on such personal issues. By “doing your own work,” Roberta is referring to ongoing self reflexivity and healing processes such as feminist-informed individual or group counselling, ceremony and embodied practices to better understand and resolve the implications of her social locations for how she relates to women learners. These will enable facilitators to separate their own issues from the learners’ and to be secure in leading learners into the sometimes scary places of self discovery. In this way, the role of the educator has a great deal of overlap with that of counsellors or healers.

Unlike the majority of the educators, Bezawit made some specific comments on her idea about intersectionality. Her understanding of the theory included the idea that power differentials are associated with different aspects of identity (Crenshaw, 1989) and that these power differentials are based on systemic processes (Hill-Collins, 1990). This way of understanding and taking up intersectionality is central to this dissertation.

Bezawit remarked (August 10, 2009) that intersectionality can often be taken up just as a way of talking about similarities and differences, leaving a, “flatness in power when we are talking about intersectionality - it is not a level playing field.” She observed that “we need to focus on how power and privilege plays out at an institutional, systemic level.” She commented (August 10, 2009) that this involves looking at how:

White supremicism and racism organizes our relationships, and it doesn’t mean someone with White skin. It means the system and practice of privileging Whiteness and systematizing Whiteness itself through ideology and discourse which shapes how we talk about things and the way relations are organized.
Finally, she shared the perspective that not all aspects of identity will play out in the same way, but that “they have different contexts in which they probably may be more salient” (August 10, 2009).

In particular, I think feminist educators must notice the nuances of power within intersectional identities. This approach differs from one in which educators focus on highlighting and keeping different aspects of identity on their radar in order to not be marginalizing any one group. This type of practice can simply be an exercise in naming social locations and gesturing towards blanket inclusion without a critical analysis of the importance of how identity plays out in group learning processes or a historical perspective of how these social locations came to be in relationship to one another (Fischer, 1996).

**Educators' Praxis that Resonates with Idea of Intersectionality**

In this section, I explore the practices that feminist educators used to name and address intersectional oppressions with women learners in their groups. I look first at practices that reflect a basic approach and gradually build to practices that introduce a more complex analysis. In this research, I found that there are many ways educators speak or lecture about ideas that resonate with an intersectionality framework, and, in relation, fewer practices that educators used to assist women to integrate this understanding into their ways of knowing and being. This research intervenes in this deficiency and highlights feminist educators’ successful practices. These practices attend to women’s intersecting and interlocking identities and oppressions, even while these conceptual theories may not be familiar to the educators who employ them.
To begin, the educators spoke about practices that promote an understanding of multiple social locations, based on who was in the room. One way to raise the issue of multiple social locations is to do it organically, through having learners get to know one another. Based on this intention, Sam commented that it was helpful to have learners mix with one another. She said participants are “going to have to learn to be in those places that sometimes aren’t so comfortable, and start talking about some of this stuff... So, the deaf women were with the blind women, or the deaf women were with people with mobility (dis)abilities” (May 4, 2009). I certainly think learning through discomfort is a key element to the practice of consciousness-raising around identity and power. Yet learners will not gain a profound understanding of identity through simply being with those who are differently-located. A more complex praxis is necessary.

The educators also suggested several practices that were effective for establishing an understanding of one’s multiple and compounding social locations. These included activities during which learners personally locate themselves in order to demonstrate that identity is made up of multiple social locations or identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Other activities involved learners identifying the ways in which they are oppressed and the ways in which they are privileged, which underscores the notion that power differentials are associated with different aspects of identity (Hill-Collins, 1990). For example, Nina used an exercise where learners identified their own social locations in order to raise awareness of their different experiences and of the different social locations of each learner. She explained the “in and out activity,” which involved participants standing in a circle and going into the middle of the circle momentarily if the educator called out a category that applied to their experiences. Nina used various attributes and demographic type categories, interspersed with other categories (such as: “I was born outside of
Canada, I am a senior citizen, I have children, I do some paid work, I have experienced discrimination, or I have been affected by discrimination”) (April 13, 2009). Everyone notes who is in the middle of the circle, participants step back and then the next category is called out.

Nina found this practice worked very well with the marginalized women she met in her three-hour workshops. She noted (April 13, 2009):

We don't talk that much about oppression in that I don't ask women to delve into their experiences of oppression either because that's also a very emotional place and a very painful place and in a three hour workshop I'm not going to be able to conduct some kind of healing with people. So that's why it's more of a game. Let's go in and out. Let's get comfortable with using these terms. Let's understand what discrimination is.

If an educator uses questions that target oppression and privilege, this activity can reveal that all individuals have some privileges and are oppressed at the same time.

Em and Viv also explained an activity that involves learners identifying the ways in which they are oppressed and the ways in which they are privileged. Viv recounted (January 13, 2009) a process where learners go to different stations and have conversations with others:

You go to one in the first round where you experience oppression, and the next round you go to where you experience privilege. And so you talk about both sides... a guy of colour will go, probably to people of colour one, for aspects of oppression, and go to the gender one, for where he experiences privilege. So you get that kind of mix.

These types of activities mentioned above can play out in a way similar to the simplistic approach of solely naming a collection of social locations, which I referred to earlier. I feel these types of exercises can be very useful to set the tone for engaging in issues of identity, but do not
go far or deep enough on their own to raise and address issues of identity, power and difference. As Tina noted (September 1, 2009):

   It’s going to be expected as a part of an anti-oppression session that race is going to come up, and you know, women will dutifully say, “I’m White,” but it’s almost like, “And so once I say that, I can move on.”

   If the discussion is not taken further, these activities will not only be ineffective, but can also be unsafe. Alone, these exercises can trigger women based on the ways in which they are marginalized. Once such topics are raised, they must be dealt with responsibly. Ways to do this will be outlined throughout this dissertation, as I develop my argument for effective practices.

   The educators also spoke of processes that allowed them to raise issues of multiple oppressions, or to raise aspects of oppression, that affected women who were not in the room. Tina, among others, noted (July 3, 2009) that in her work (in this case with social workers), her praxis focused on helping learners think about their multiple social locations and the social locations of those they work with. Tina found this awareness of identities was crucial for social workers wanting to work effectively with their clients. She reflected that educators must think and practice in ways that do not collude in looking at just one aspect of identity (December 10, 2008).

   Em and Viv (May 9, 2008) employed case studies to raise the issue of differing social locations without having to rely on learners to draw on their own experiences. They opted not to draw on the experiences in the room so that learners with marginalized aspects of identity would not be put on the spot to speak about painful experiences, and be further marginalization as a result. While case studies are effective for raising issues, I think the social locations raised also
The final approach for assisting learners in understanding that one individual houses multiple social locations was to build an analysis of one aspect of identity onto another. For example, examine race and then look at how class interlinks and affects race. Within this, Tina argued for organization change processes focused on equity to start from a known identity, or one where there is support, and then move to an unknown facet or an aspect of identity where there is not (as much) support when building learners' awareness (December 10, 2008). As an example of what Tina was calling for, Sam spoke about how she worked with a group of women where all were racialized and some lived with (dis)abilities. In this group Sam found there was a great deal of openness to exploring issues of race, but issues of (dis)ability were not embraced as much. Her approach was to begin the process of analysis with the experience and needs of racialized women and then added a layer of complexity by asking the group to then consider the experience and needs of women with (dis)abilities who are from racialized communities (May 4, 2009).

Em also thought it worked to start the analysis with marginalized aspects of identity with which participants felt familiar and then expand the analysis from there. For example, she noted that in their work, “class consciousness is built by talking about workers, then introducing the idea of working class” [my emphasis] (April 24, 2008). This means that in their learning processes the educators first utilize activities and have discussions that introduce the idea of having an identity as a worker. Once this is a comfortable idea for learners they then explore how being a worker is associated with a systemic class struggle.
I feel that this type of laddering approach could be quite effective because it is always powerful and effective to start from the participants’ experience. A laddering approach would help to address the complexity in utilizing an intersectionality framework. A process for breaking down intersectionality would also be helpful in encouraging learners to embrace this framework, given that discussing privilege and oppression can be personally triggering, regardless of one’s social locations.

While all of these approaches are useful and work towards enhancing learners’ understanding of the complexities of identity, these alone do not go far enough. It is important to also incorporate the ways in which facets of identity are joined simultaneously and aspects of oppression are compounding (Crenshaw, 1989). Overall I did not find that the feminist educators outlined praxis that captured this understanding of identities.

A final important aspect of identity is the understanding that power differentials are associated with different aspects of identity. One thing the educators spoke about that has the capability to raise power differentials is the sharing of experiences. Sam noted (May 4, 2009) that in some cases learners could gain an understanding of the complicated nature of identities without a lot of facilitated activities, but more organically when “a woman with a (dis)ability actually had to sit and be present to the way that her deaf colleague was communicating.” For this reason Sam believed that women would benefit from being involved in a parallel process strictly dedicated to getting to know one another. She imagined that this could happen outside of training and be facilitated by someone “without an agenda” or who had no vested interest in any specific outcomes (May 4, 2009).

I would echo Sam’s sentiment that the coming together of differently-located women can be very powerful regardless of the task that brings them together. However, I think it is important
to go beyond just sharing experiences and stories to analysing the *meaning* within these experiences. The small group consciousness-raising method involves four stages: 1) opening up, 2) sharing, 3) analysing and 4) abstracting (Allen, 2000). As a learning practice, sharing is insufficient if seen as an end in and of itself, and the activity will likely not result in realizations about one’s power in relation to others.

One way to take stories beyond the mundane is to look at the systemic nature of our experiences. To help participants understand what systemic power looks like, Nina would use examples drawing on what was shared in her group. Nina recounted (April 13, 2009) one of her examples of classism:

So I might be able to discriminate against you and that hurts your feelings, but then if I deny you a job or if a government keeps you on welfare or on ODSP, that keeps you at such a poverty level you can't get ahead, that's systemic.

Nina also drew on the metaphor of the triangle as a tool for this conversation. As she noted (Nina, April 13, 2009), this was useful to explain:

Capitalism, hierarchies, you know, how people are pitted against each other […] the layers of oppression and who’s at the top of the pyramid and who’s at the bottom of the pyramid. Looking at, “Oh, yes, some women make it up to the top of the pyramid and who are they?”

Alma also created a table (see Table 2, Aspects of Power Chart) that is useful in sparking conversation about power and aspects of identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Man</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Able Bodied</th>
<th>Rich</th>
<th>Straight</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>25-55</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Native/person of colour</td>
<td>(dis)abled</td>
<td>Poor Homeless</td>
<td>LGBTQ</td>
<td>Non-Christian</td>
<td>Youth Elder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Aspects of Power Chart

The top row shows the dominant or normative aspect of identities. The bottom row shows those with less power who become “Othered” through systemic processes. She uses this chart to help learners see who has power, and to underline that those with power are not those in the room. As Nina mentioned (April 13, 2009), it is not enough to just present this, but the educator must complicate it, saying, “so, where are you in that?” You know, ‘who are you as a person who identifies as a woman, but who else are you?’”

Alma goes a step further and shares Marion Iris Young's (1992), article called the “Five Faces of Oppression” with participants, a work that describes how exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural domination and violence play a role in maintaining structures of domination. Alma noted that this focus on the systemic helps women see as one learner said to her, “Now it’s clear to me that it’s not all my fault” (May 7, 2008).

This global perspective is an important one for learners to have, provided they are still encouraged to take personal responsibility for the roles they occupy in these systemic dynamics based on their social locations. The educators differed on this balance between the personal and systemic as the ideal starting point for analysis. In my mind, which of these is chosen as the starting point is not nearly as important as ensuring that both the personal and the systemic are held within learners understandings at the same time, and that educators promote a dialectic conversation between each perspective.
Another way to raise consciousness about power differentials is to draw parallels between different experiences. Roberta would do this by finding an issue that was connected to the topic she wanted to raise; this gives learners a point of relating. For example:

So if there’s nobody in the room who is (dis)abled - ... I think there’s never such a thing, because there’s always some type of... health issue - something that can be connected, but sometimes people don’t realize, or they don’t identify (Roberta, June 12, 2009).

While Sam had not tried this approach, she imagined that drawing parallels between different aspects of marginalization would make it possible for learners to see their similarities instead of being alienated by their differences. For example, she thought that the experience of women who lived with (dis)abilities had parallels, ―around genocide and First Nations and Aboriginal communities‖ (Sam, May 4, 2009). She noted that women who are pregnant with a foetus suspected of having (dis)abilities have been encouraged to terminate their pregnancies and women with (dis)abilities have been discouraged from reproducing. Sam also felt the experiences of women who lived with (dis)abilities could be paralleled with any other identity group that had experienced segregation, because, “segregation is actually something that maybe many of us [with (dis)abilities] have felt” (May 4, 2009).

In general I think using parallels must be done with extreme caution in order to avoid discounting the oppressions that a certain group faces. I think Sam’s gravitation to the use of parallels comes from the general populations’ difficulty in understanding issues of (dis)ability, and her desire to address this as an educator. As she reflected (May 4, 2009):

There are parts of me that [make me] feel like I need to decontextualize my experiences so that other people will hear it. But really, to contextualize it, I
actually need to talk about the (dis)ability. And so a good facilitator, I get a sense, can handle that.

As discussed in Chapter Four, educators must find a delicate balance when raising the issue of power dynamics if they want to avoid triggering learners. I agree with Sam that it is important to think about practices that address the issues in ways that do not trigger learners, just as it is important to have methods available that challenge learners. An experienced and well-prepared educator can draw on a variety of techniques depending on the contextual factors, such as the level of trust in the group, how challenged the group or specific group members have been throughout the specific session or workshop series as well as an individuals’ willingness to challenge themselves among other factors.

**Interlocking Identities**

As defined in Chapter One, interlocking identities refers to how individuals construct themselves through contact with the Other. I considered the stories educators told me about their practices and examined them for elements of the interlocking identities framework, drawing on the understanding that:

- Interlocking oppression [or identities] accounts for how race, class, gender (as well as other identities) co-constitute one another in ways that cannot be separated in White supremacist capitalist patriarchy (Razack & Fellows, 1998)
- Systems of oppression come into existence in and through one another (Razack & Fellows, 1998)

The educators I spoke with had ideas and praxis related to how social locations co-constitute one another, as well as in terms of how systems of oppression come into existence in and through one another (Razack & Fellows, 1998). These two aspects of the interlocking
identities framework were hard to separate, in contrast to the distinct aspects within an intersectionality framework.

**Educators’ Ideas that Resonate with Interlocking Oppression**

While many of the educators spoke about their learning processes in ways that recognize intersecting oppressions, they had relatively few ideas that resonated with an interlocking identities framework. Roberta, however, shared several comments. She observed (January 23, 2009) that, in group settings, learners will frequently talk about the ways in which they are oppressed while simultaneously oppressing others in the same space. To me, this indicates that Roberta understands that learners are continually co-constructing one another and (re)creating oppression and hierarchies. Her pedagogical stance is one that discourages learners from deploying power and privilege in a way that pits one against another or creates a hierarchy of oppression. From this, I can see that her aim is for participants to witness how they both oppress and are oppressed through everyday acts.

Roberta also reflected that learners and educators are constantly co-constructing one another’s social locations and oppressions when they react to problematic comments during group sessions. She shared (June 12, 2009) how we:

Need to watch for reinforcing racism – if a White woman makes a racist comment and is called on it and cries and the facilitator automatically supports the White women. “Nancy’s crying, so you’ve done something wrong.” And this is the same punishment – racism - that happens within group a lot. That is very wide spread, what I’m talking about, in terms of Nancy crying and Nancy being supported in whatever action that she’s taking and she has never had to be accountable for her reaction.
Roberta’s insights regarding the interlocking nature of oppressions are apt, and Mika, Bezawit and Brenda shared similar insights, which I highlight through the case studies in Chapter Six.

In conclusion, it was interesting to note, however, that while many educators were able to describe practices that resonated with interlocking oppression/power, few educators articulated ideas or concepts about the interlocking nature of identities in ways that resonate with theories which took up these same concepts. In the next section on educators’ praxis that resonates with interlocking identities, I explore these practices and what happens when they are employed without the articulation of conceptual ideas to support them.

**Educators’ Praxis that Resonates with Interlocking Identities**

In this section, I explore the practices that feminist educators used to raise and address the idea of how identities are co-constructed between and among individuals with women learners in their groups. As this section illustrates, while relatively few of the educators articulated *ideas* about the nature of interlocking identities, they had a lot of *practices* or praxis that reflected this idea.

The educators shared a few instances in which they spoke to their learners about the dynamic of how social locations are co-constructed. They also spoke about numerous concrete activities and practices that they used to enable learners to incorporate these ideas into their ways of knowing. Alma stressed that she lead learners through personal location exercises not *just* so they would see different social locations, but also in order to provide a “tool for them to see a little bit more how oppression works” (Alma, May 4, 2010). I believe that her intention was that
if learners were appropriately debriefed after a personal location activity they may see how systems of oppression come into existence in and through one another as a result.

Em and Viv spoke about several ways they demonstrated interlocking oppressions and promoted conversation with their groups. They used the Triangle of Oppression (see Figure 7) to look at different forms of oppression.

![Triangle of Oppression](image)

*Figure 7. Triangle of oppression.*

Em (January 12, 2009) drew multiple version of the triangle on separate overhead transparencies, each featuring different facets of identity. She then used the overheads to show the distinct and overlapping nature of social locations using this visual. She noted that learners:

Start to see that it’s not one thing or another - that you can’t say racial oppression and not gender oppression. You know, that in fact usually you can’t peel off whatever the particular layer is. […] And that’s helpful in terms of the deepening piece so that people can see *both* privilege and discrimination kind of in one breath.

Her triangle presentation accurately reflects the complexities of multiple social locations, yet depending on how it is facilitated may or may not show how social locations co-constitute
one another in ways that cannot be separated in White supremacist capitalist patriarchy (Razack & Fellows, 1998). I think that the Triangle diagram would be quite effective when learners are guided in actively relating this framework to their lives. Figure 8. Triangle of Oppression illustrating Power and Oppression shows an example where the Triangle has been used to illustrate the concepts it outlines. This is a general illustration of privilege and oppression using the Triangle, which moves towards my suggestion that each learner use the Triangle to illustrate their personal relationships to power and oppression.

Figure 8. Triangle of oppression illustrating power and oppression.

Viv also spoke about how they used an activity called the “Power Line Up” (January 13, 2009) in which learners physically locate themselves in terms of their power in relation to other learners (see more detailed description of this activity in Chapter Six, Case Study Two). Finally, they explained that they use media and images that are encoded with power relations in order to trigger learners’ responses (January 13, 2009).
All of these practices would be effective if educators ensure that learners apply these as tools to deconstruct their own lives. This reminds me of the importance of a two step process, which Freire outlined in his critical literacy process, that concerns both encoding and decoding information. Encoding involves creating or presenting an object or image called a “code” that could be read for a variety of meanings. After the educator presents the code she leads a critical discussion to decode or uncover the individual meanings that the learners read onto this code and to problematize what this meant for their lives and those of the community. As an example, Freire presented workers with an image of a red brick, which resonated with the themes of work, housing, and landlord/tenant relations. Each of these themes presented opportunities for the workers to discuss and strategize taking social action.

To include the step of decoding to the example of the Triangle or the media image, I would envision learners creating their own Triangle or media image, drawing on an instance in their lives where they were oppressed as well as where they experienced an aspect of privilege. This would ensure that learners were not just exploring how they are oppressed, and in doing so “racing towards innocence.”

In the following sections I explore specific practices that the educator employed, which fall within the category of intersectionality praxis.

*Historicize and Deconstruct Colonial Relations*

Roberta elicited women learners’ understanding of identity co-construction by historicizing and deconstructing Black women’s identity in the context of slavery and colonialism. For example, when working on an HIV awareness project for African women, the
group focused on media constructions of overly sexualized Black women in order to situate their experiences of oppression. Roberta noted that the group members considered the complicated and exploitative conceptions of sexuality that Black women shared as they “looked at pleasure, and what does that mean in terms of the context African enslavement and pleasure, which was, you know, rape” (November 22, 2008).

I understand this historical deconstruction as working to underline identity co-construction. As Toni Morrison (1992) points out, even if the Other is absent in a text, they are still present in terms of the role this Other plays in constructing a privileged identity. In this case, Black women’s construction as overly sexualized by colonizers was used to justify rape during enslavement, and in turn enabled Victorian White women to construct themselves in contrast as chaste and civilized. Here, critical race theory provides important insights and is an effective tool for analysis that women learners can apply to interpreting many situations in their lives.

However, it was not recommended to give learners reading in areas such as critical race theory. Sam noted that assigning readings as a way to transmit such theory was not effective in her processes. For the most part, women either did not have the time to do readings or found them too dense. For example, women commented, “I don’t really know what you’re asking me to do, because I can’t read any of this stuff. I can’t get through any of it” (Sam, May 4, 2009). An inherent strength of non-credit learning contexts is their accessibility; I suspect this reaction to readings in a non-credit learning process would be similar for a range of women given the multiple demands on their time and differing educational backgrounds and literacy levels.

In light of this, Roberta’s example provides ideas for how to develop an awareness of interlocking oppressions, without the need for reading dense texts that may not be accessible to all women learners.
Challenging Everyday (Inappropriate) Behaviours

The educators also challenged learners around their everyday interactions within the group in ways that resonated with an analysis of interlocking oppressions. For example, Tina illustrated a practice that names how oppression is systemic and considers how to avoid the co-constitution practices that often take place within White supremacist capitalist patriarchy. She noted in her organizational change work that it was an essential practice to apply analysis to individual’s daily work tasks. She noted (December 10, 2008):

The best way [...] is not to do the kinds of typical facilitated sessions on anti-oppression which are around attitude, right? But to tie it to performance appraisal, and things like succession planning, promotions, etc., [for] people who know how to use the language, but have no intention of actually doing the kind of in-depth organization change work to shift power, or to implement. The only thing that works with them is actually taking the pieces of work from their work plan and require an anti-oppression integrated approach, and to have that reviewed by their superior, who hopefully also has access to the development or opportunities they need. It changes the whole motivation for that participant to be engaged in anti-oppression work.

For example, in order to ensure that employees are able to apply an anti-oppression analysis in their work, job posting descriptions and interview processes must reflect how this analysis is best put into practice on a daily basis. She described (December 10, 2008) an example:

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26 For more on the topic of challenging see Chapter Six Case Studies.
The approach is to put in language that’s really well thought out in job descriptions and job qualifications. So it’s not like there’s just a clause that says “has anti-oppression skills” or “can work with a diverse group,” that’s crap, right? It doesn’t tell you anything. [Instead the job posting should] talk about understanding the health issues of racialized, Aboriginal, lesbian women and talk about the analysis that’s being bought to understanding health and the determinants of health from that perspective, and whatever it is for a particular area of work.

Considering organizational policies and job descriptions is one very proactive way to address power imbalances.

Other methods that the educators spoke about focused on interactions between learners engaged in processes that involved direct challenging. Challenging other people's behaviours in this way is not easy to do. As mentioned in Chapter Four, educators may worry about hurting people’s feelings, fear retaliation or losing the group's trust and respect. One response to this fear that Sam offered is to focus on positive outcomes. She reflected on her role as an educator as she said (May 4, 2009):

You have a chance to see how you can make a difference, how you can actually create an atmosphere where others in the room who might be Queer can feel safer, and are looking to you to feel safer. […] You have a chance to be an ally with somebody. […] Maybe my position of privilege can be something that is good.

I think this is a necessary perspective, and educators have an obligation to ally themselves with participants who normally do not feel they have a great number of allies in broader society.

In order for challenging to be effective, learners need to understand that this is part of the group culture at the outset. Roberta’s group had a mission statement that asserted the need to support all social locations of all members in the group. As she stated (August 10, 2009):
We have to interrupt the racism, the classism, the heterosexism. To me it’s a must. […] I think it has to happen, because if we’re not, then what we are really doing is supporting all the systems that are creating this violence against the women that come to our groups. To me, we’re not being responsible, we’re not being accountable, and we’re also being dangerous. It’s dangerous not to deal with violence that happens within the groups, to me.

Roberta, Brenda, Bezawit and Alma, who all spoke about establishing a culture in which challenges occurred, asserted that learners need to be clear from the beginning that challenges did not only need to come from educators, but could be initiated by other group members as well. Roberta spoke about raising issues and challenging participants as being a shared responsibility in the group.

Addressing privilege is particularly difficult if educators hope to have learners play an active role in naming and challenging one another’s problematic displays of privilege. Roberta spoke (June 12, 2009) about the tension inherent in sharing this responsibility within her group. While she wanted to ensure that learning took place, it was difficult for her to know when to step back and let the group address issues. She said (June 12, 2009):

I myself have to question, sometimes, am I tampering with what needs to be done within the group dynamic? I struggle with that, because you want to sometimes be there and be a support for the person to support themselves, but sometimes you need to just stay back and let the group figure out that support. And that is, I think, one of the most challenging for me - to let people do the work.

I agree that the role of challenging should ideally be shared with group members, although this works best once learners are more aware of interlocking oppressions and are more comfortable with other members of the group. While having learners in leadership roles to initiate challenges
is an excellent practice, few educators spoke about this. For that reason, in the remainder of this section I focus solely on the ways in which effective challenges were initiated by the educators.

The educators noted several ways they could challenge learners. For example by asking how learners benefit from making certain comments (Roberta, June 12, 2009). Educators also spoke about the need to point out the problem with stereotypical or discriminatory comments and say these comments are inaccurate and wrong, not just say the comment stereotypes others (Em, May 1, 2008).

Sam, in particular, felt that challenges were only productive at certain points in a learners’ process. She noted that she knew to challenge them “when they start questioning, for themselves, or when they’re open to actually go, ‘Oh, I never actually thought about it that way’” (Sam, May 4, 2009). She ascertained that learners were questioning not only when they asked overt questions, but also, “it would be the way that we talk about something. And if people are able to kind of step out of their experience for a few minutes. I grab those few minutes where I can” (Sam, May 4, 2009). I agree this is an excellent gauge of when learners are ready for new information or a different perspective on how they had previously been viewing their reality. I also think it is a great general insight to take the moments when you can instead of waiting for an ideal moment to present itself within the planned program. Most effective learning moments are emergent and educators should be prepared to see openings and to make the most of them.

Sam also felt it was a good time to challenge learners when “their analysis is not so steeped in that feeling depleted place” (May 4, 2009). I found this to be a very apt observation. It is important to maintain a balance between critical and hopeful and to sustain that hope (Jensen, 2001). Sam and Nina both agreed that when they were challenged they needed to hear about specific behaviours, as opposed to being vague statements, like, “When you talk about it this
way, it’s problematic.” If the educators, who presumably are expected to be well versed in anti-oppression praxis, need specificity when they are challenged, it is almost certain that the average learner will need such direction as well.

Tina commented that processing a behaviour that needs to be challenged can be effectively done by breaking into small groups to work the piece through. She noted that this works “to restore the safety, but also to ensure the challenge happens” (Tina, May 6, 2008). She also noted that grouping participants in small group caucuses based on social locations of privilege rather than oppression can help to keep the topic focused on taking responsibility for behaviours that the learners themselves have the power to change (Tina, July 3, 2009). This is a very useful practice that has wide spread implications for addressing the challenge of learners racing towards innocence whenever an uncomfortable topic is raised.

While there are no set rules that will always work in terms of how to challenge learners, Roberta shared an important insight, which is that it is very important that the educators know the participants. She observed that when she has known learners over a period of time through different learning processes or contexts, she develops a greater sense of what aspects she can challenge women on and how to go about the challenge (Roberta, June 12, 2009). I see this as very instructive, and it underlines the centrality of establishing relationships of trust and respect with learners.

Other comments about challenging that I feel are useful in building successful learning practices centre around the timing of challenges. Sam felt that challenges needed to be immediate and in context. She said (May 4, 2009):
I have to be able to pick it up quickly. You know, it’s like being able to catch it in that moment. So that people can make that link to what was just said, as opposed to, “You know, when so and so said, ten minutes ago…”

This is a key point, and the practice requires that educators have a keen analysis of everyday interactions. Still, while it may be best not to ruminate or second guess oneself about whether it is appropriate to make an intervention, educators must know that they can always create an opportunity to return to an issue, even if the moment has passed. To do this, educators can review what learners remember about the incident and provide an opportunity for them to share the impact the incident had on them. In addition to processing the challenge from a common starting point, this practice also reveals important insights about the nature of intersectionality based on the different experiences of learners from different social locations.

When considering the timing of challenges, educators must also recognize that learners need breaks from this difficult work. As Sam noted (May 4, 2009):

I think people do need to have an out, or to have a break from thinking about it, or being challenged by it all the time. How do we create places for people to *come into* the conversation about (dis)ability? I think people have to gauge [when to come in and out] for themselves. And create a number of opportunities and exercises for people to come in; to be able to do that for themselves.

I do think that creating a number of opportunities is important, so that learners can choose when to come out of their comfort zones and challenge themselves. However, I also believe that challenges are by nature uncomfortable and learners may invariably try to avoid feeling this discomfort unless confronted. In this way, the educator unfortunately, but necessarily, plays an unpopular role sometimes. Sam noted that the process of challenging can take place over a longer period of time, with different aspects of the challenge being returned to in different ways.
until the learning is incorporated into group members’ ways of knowing and being. I think this is insightful. Given that the patterns that caused learners to act in problematic ways have been learned over the course of a lifetime, it is impractical to think these can be unlearned quickly.

**Creating an Environment for Difficult Conversations**

Exploring social locations and naming and addressing privilege and oppression is difficult work that calls on learners and educators alike to engage in difficult conversations. While not all of the educators spoke directly about intersectionality or interlocking identities, they all mentioned the need to create an environment of trust, respect and comfort in order to assist women learners in doing this work.

In this spirit Nina critiqued the standard starting point for many learning practices. She commented (April 13, 2009):

I think often we start in with people with oppression and privilege. I think we start in the wrong order sometimes. That’s been my experience here at [drop-in hosting learning process]. We get a whole bunch of women into our program and then we say, “Okay, let's talk about the differences between us.”

We assume the skills to talk about those differences. And I feel for people who've had bad experiences with education - which a lot of the folks in the drop-ins have - for people who've been out of school for a very long time and for people who’ve not had particular training in this kind of stuff… we don't really listen to each other; we don't really know how to talk to each other. If we have a little understanding of ourselves and we have a few basic skills for how to talk about ourselves or talk about how we perceive something or what is an “I” statement, all that theory kind of stuff, *then* I feel that people are better equipped to talk about oppression and privilege.
This is very perceptive. Yet because there is such an importance placed on conveying these frameworks and practices, and often such a limited timeframe within which to do so, learners are seldom equipped with the tools needed to be *successful* in this process.

Another perspective on how to approach these difficult conversations is to think about what is demanded of learners in the consciousness-raising process. Educators mentioned vulnerability and discussed its importance at length in one of the focus groups. Bezawit said (April 23, 2009):

> I'm asking participants to divulge. I'm asking participants to make themselves vulnerable. I have to make myself vulnerable. But that vulnerability has to be done in a way that doesn't somehow subsume the vulnerability of others. Or somehow displace it, or misplace it or consume it. It's done in a way that connects with, adds to the discussion.

This is a helpful perspective, and it underlines a subtle but important difference in terms of what educators must model, as opposed to what they should do in order to illicit a desired response from learners.

**The Centrality of Identity in Educators’ Praxis**

Issues of identity surfaced in this research in several ways. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the educators’ social locations created barriers, limiting what aspects of identity they were comfortable raising with women learners. However, the feminist educators’ social locations also acted as the grounding for their work, which fuelled their passion and commitment, and impacted their understanding and incorporation of the frameworks of intersectionality and interlocking identities in their work.
How Educators’ Identity Informed Motivation for Doing the Work

While they were not explicitly asked during interviews or focus groups, educators clearly expressed their reasons for doing their work. What the educators related revealed that what they do is grounded in their social locations; it is impossible to separate why they are working at facilitating consciousness-raising with differently-located women from how they do this work. Roberta commented, “Being grounded in [my] location is the only way that I’m able to work. “It could be a skill or a deficit, but that’s the only way” (Roberta, August 10, 2009). Alma echoed this sentiment as she said (August 10, 2009):

I wouldn’t be able to do anything that hasn’t come from my own experience. I don’t think there’s a fibre in my body that would be able to do that. . . . I’d like to think that everything I did was connected to who I am, who I was, who I will be, and all that.

Sam also commented on this (August 10, 2009):

I think it’s key to really look at your own lived experience in a group where women with (dis)abilities are coming together, where no one’s actually ever created that space for them to think about themselves in another way. […] Because you know, the messages out there are pretty big around my placement in the world. So I have to think about that and not perpetuate that, but also to acknowledge that it’s present.

In short, Sam feels that she needs to remain grounded and provide an empowering role model for other women living with (dis)abilities, while not negating the strong societal messages about (dis)ability with which they are contending.
The educators continued to delve into the relationship between their social locations and why they do this work. Roberta spoke about how her social locations of oppression guide her motivations as an educator. She shared (Roberta, August 10, 2009):

I think some people doing the work have choice and some people don’t. I find limited choice. For me, where I grew up and my background — there’s no choice in this. […] I come from collectively doing things in community. You have to. You either do this or you get violated.

Alma spoke from a position of privilege as well as oppression, reflecting that aspects of her oppression guide her analysis and that her privileges enable her to do the work. She noted (Alma, August 10, 2009):

There’s something that’s happened to me in my life that has allowed me to talk about those experiences. There’s a certain amount of privilege, good fortune that has contributed to me being where I am and able to do the work that I am doing. […] So I think that the connection of what I’m able to do and where I was and how that felt, that really tells me that I need to keep doing this, right. Because what else is there to do?

**Educators’ Identity Impacts how They Do the Work**

Educators also reflected on the ways in which their social locations framed (or constrained) where they were willing to go in terms of challenging others. For example, Sam noted that her identities as a lesbian living with a (dis)ability dictated how she felt she could most effectively challenge a learner. In relation to challenging, she shared (May 4, 2009):

When I’m talking to people about (dis)ability I think it gets heard differently when it’s from me than it would be from someone who’s my non-(dis)abled ally.
I’m just a bitter lesbian if […] I challenge people around that. […] They will hear me, but they will see me as being skewed.

Nina also spoke about how as a White queer woman she is more comfortable speaking about violence against women or about homophobia than speaking about racism, even though she feels it is an important topic. She noted, “If I'm talking about racism I know that I'm anticipating more resistance than when I'm talking about sexism” (Nina, May 5, 2009).

This also parallels the comfort levels educators have in sharing about themselves. A few of the educators reflected that they felt most comfortable speaking about aspects of marginalization they shared with women learners, as opposed to those they did not embody. For example, Nina shared (May 5, 2009):

I do try to talk about myself from a variety of aspects of self. I think I'm most confident talking about the experiences of oppression from those places where I feel I experience oppression. So it's an interesting thing.

Tina echoed this thinking as she reflected on her work with LGBTQ communities:

I find it difficult work to do, and I’m trying to be as respectful and careful as I can, not to impose the questions that come up from me as a heterosexual person on people from those communities. […] But I’m cautious […] it’s not something that I’ve receive direction from the people who belong to those communities, and I’d feel a lot better if it was (July 2, 2009).

On a parallel note, it appeared that most of the educators were uncomfortable speaking about aspects of their identity associated with privilege. This was evident when I asked educators how they self identified; in most cases, I had to probe to discover how they identified as privileged. This omission with regard to privilege was also evident in that it was rarely
mentioned apart from describing the difficulties in confronting women learners on their privilege, as described in Chapter Four. As Nina said, “speaking from privilege is definitely harder. It's more challenging and I feel like the ground under me just getting a little shakier” (May 5, 2009).

The one way in which the educators’ social locations of privilege were raised was through their recognition that their relative privilege was what enabled them to do conscious-raising work with other women. While many of the educators spoke about being grounded in their social locations of oppression, others said that they do the work because of their marginalized social locations and history of oppression, but are able to do it because of privileges they experience. Alma connected her work to her experiences of privilege, as she noted (August 10, 2009):

There’s a certain amount of whatever, privilege, good fortune, you know, whatever, it has happened that has contributed to me being where I am and able to do the work that I am doing. And that’s where the difference is, I think, I see that I am able to do this, so I also don’t forget the fact that I was there at one point. So I think that that connection of what I’m able to do and where I was and how that felt, that really tells me that I need to keep doing this.

Educators comfort in primarily speaking from aspects of marginalization they share with learners has wide spread implications for how challenges and the general learning process unfolds, which I continue to explore in the next sections of this chapter.
Identity and Feminist Standpoint

Generally speaking, educators' social locations, and the extent to which they have drawn on their lived realities and struggled to achieve a feminist standpoint, will inform and dictate the ways they are able to take up the complex issues of identity, power and oppression within their learning processes.

As we know, marginality,\(^{27}\) which is a common identification for women (albeit with variance based on other social locations), produces valuable knowledge (Hill-Collins, 2004). I would disagree with Sandoval (2000) who argues that a woman of colour’s oppositional consciousness is a strategic position from which to achieve a feminist standpoint. I would argue that it is not only a woman of colour’s oppositional consciousness that is a strategic position from which to achieve a feminist standpoint, but that any social locations of marginality can make a valuable contribution if informed by an oppositional consciousness.

In fact, this research makes an argument for the collective development of a feminist standpoint, which will be nuanced by the unique intersectional contributions of the oppositional consciousness of differently situated women.

Conclusion

In this exploration, I uncovered the myriad ways that educators raised consciousness with women learners around their intersecting identities and how their identities were co-constituted through interaction with other individuals. The educators had many ideas that resonated with the

\(^{27}\) Although Sandoval may have implied this, I would stress again that valuable knowledge comes not simply from having a marginalized identity, but that valuable knowledge comes from those with marginalized identities who have struggled to become oppositionally conscious.
concept of intersectionality; however, they suggested relatively few practices that I found would raise women learners’ consciousness to form a particularly strong analysis in this area. All of the educators spoke of the way that identity is made up of multiple social locations. Several practices considered the way that power is vested in different aspects of identity, which is important. However, a more complexified view that considers how facets of identity are separate yet joined simultaneously, or how multiple oppressions are compounding in nature was largely absent.

Conversely, the educators related few ideas that resonated with interlocking identities, but shared a wealth of practices that illustrated ways to raise understanding of ideas which are the focus on this same framework. In general, my analysis revealed that even while educators were able to present learners with a complexified understanding of identity, power and oppression grounded in principles related to an interlocking identities framework, they could not necessarily articulate practices or activities that would enable learners to take up and implement similar ways of knowing in their own lives.

Furthermore, I found that educators take up these frameworks in different ways based on their social locations. I found that educators with privileged aspects of identity endeavour to employ these frameworks, while educators with more aspects of marginalization that include racialization conduct their learning processes in a way that resonates with, but does not necessarily seek to follow, intersectionality and interlocking identities frameworks.
CHAPTER SIX:
SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES CASE STUDIES

Introduction

In this chapter, I detail two different learning processes that reflect the practices of three feminist educators. I have chosen these cases of Brenda and Beawit’s Facilitator Train-the-Trainer and Mika’s Reclaiming Indigenous Feminisms as examples of successful practices.

Beawit, Brenda and Mika mentioned that they take up a variety of oppressions in their learning processes. However, in both instances, the examples the educators used to illustrate their practices and pedagogies only name and address racism and colonialism. Nevertheless, I chose these examples as cases studies because I believe the practices and pedagogies the educators used represent the most successful examples of pedagogies and practices that address issues of power and identity.

I consider successful pedagogies and practices to be those where the educator draws on and engages with everyday interactions as a source for learning; does not back away from discomfort or conflict; gives depth to issues; provides ways to think about complexity; encourages insight, and not just action; and enables learners to readily apply these ideas to their everyday lives. In particular, I considered practices to be successful if they showed multiple means by which to raise a complexified understanding with learners about individual multiple differences and the ways in which social locations are co-constructed between individuals in ways that reinforce oppression.

In Chapter Five, many educators advocated the taking up of multiple aspects of identity simultaneously. The limitation of choosing these case studies means that this multifaceted approach is not illustrated, as only one aspect of identity is being addressed at a time. As a result,
the reader must consider how these practices and pedagogies could be adapted to working with multiple axes of identity. Similarly, educators need to adapt these approaches when working with women of varying intersecting and interlocking identities.

In the first case study, I explore the practices of Bezawit and Brenda’s Facilitator-Train-the-Trainer program. This program selected women to be trained as facilitators who would then run their own support or advocacy groups for women. This case highlights examples of the ways everyday challenges can be used to raise awareness of interlocking oppressions.

In the second case study I look at Mika’s process called “Reclaiming Indigenous Feminisms.” This process was open for all women interested in exploring their understanding of feminisms and the Indigenous roots of feminisms. This process was effective in connecting women across differences in order to share experiences and in facilitating challenges grounded in the recognition of the compounded systemic barriers that Indigenous women face. This case also touches on how decolonizing practices can highlight the interlocking nature of women’s shared realities.

**Case Study #1 – Bezawit and Brenda’s Facilitator Train-the-Trainer Program**

*The Educators*

The Facilitator Train-the-Trainer Program was run by Brenda and Bezawit. The program was rooted in the educators' individual identities, political orientation and skills sets. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Bezawit identifies as a Black Feminist and a lesbian. She is in her 50s, is middle class and has a Master’s degree. She developed and initiated the Facilitator Train-the-Trainer Program.
Bezawit’s pedagogical approach is deeply influenced by such feminist theorists as the writers of *This Bridge Called My Back*, Himani Bannerji, Dionne Brand, Paulo Freire, Patricia Hill-Collins, bell hooks, Hegel, Gramsci, Lenin, Marx, Barbara Smith and Dorothy Smith, as well as women with whom she has worked in the past. She noted that these figures inform her theorizing and understanding of the intersections of difference, and what this means for how communities of colour organize “within the context of institutionalized Whiteness” (Bezawit, April 23, 2009). She noted (Bezawit, April 23, 2009) that this awareness helps her to do the important work:

Which is a change, right? And in doing that it required me to come to an understanding of myself. What all these pieces of who I identified myself as meant. And how do they operate in the world? How do they shape me? How do they shape my interactions and my relationships? How do they shape the kind of work that I'm going to do as a feminist, as a Black, lesbian feminist?

Within the Facilitator Train-the-Trainer program, Bezawit brought an embodied understanding of these theories, based on her lived reality. Within the group process, these theoretical perspectives became tools for decoding the experiences of the group. In this way, she modelled the use of theory as a pedagogical tool with which to understand everyday acts.

Bezawit co-facilitated the Facilitator Train-the-Trainer program with Brenda. Brenda identifies as a Jewish lesbian with limited mobility. Brenda is a feminist educator in her 70s, and she has a Master’s degree. She started as an educator with the Facilitator Train-the-Trainer Program when it had already been running for a few years.

Brenda has been influenced by her work overseas, which taught her a lot, but also made her cynical about “going into other people’s countries and using people’s cultures as
laboratories‖ (April 18, 2008). Through these experiences, she learned “that women were not the same and that the oppression of women was not across the board and that we had to begin understanding who we were” (Brenda, April 18, 2008). Brenda also mentioned the impact that her identity has on the processes she leads, as she stated (January 30, 2009):

> When we go into a group we bring all who we are to that group. I don't just bring those identities that interconnect. I bring the baggage that comes with all of that. I bring my attitudes, I bring what I've learned, I bring what I'm conscious of and what I'm not conscious of in my own behaviour. I bring my tendency to roll my eyes if something is said that I think is foolish... and sometimes that eye rolling may be inappropriate. I bring my body language, how I sit in a chair. I bring all the stereotypes I have - even if I've worked on them for years and years and years. I may end up responding in a particular way. I bring my tendency to want to help women who are poorer than myself.

The integrated feminist anti-oppression anti-racism framework (IFAAF) that she and Bezawit developed and used in their program resonated with her because it “required that I locate myself in relation to all of these social political issues. And recognize where I was privileged, where I had power, where I was oppressed” (April 18, 2008).

Brenda noted that her contribution to the group process was to “deconstruct my own ignorance” and “to deal with the racism that would come out” (August 10, 1009) from other White women in the group. However, I would note that having self-identified as an older, Jewish women with limited mobility Brenda could have also made contributions to the group based on her oppressed social locations. This would have modelled to learners how to navigate the tension of embodying identities of both privilege and oppression.
**Process Overview**

The program ran over several months, with weekly meetings. The program was intended for women who were primarily working in the area of violence against women. The learning process was designed to impart skills and tools about how to facilitate support groups and learning processes for women. The program goals involved learners understanding their intersections and how they are implicated in and deal with power and privilege. It also aimed to have women become accountable, and holds one another accountable, when working through power dynamics that surfaced during the process (Bezawit, May 8, 2008).

In terms of the format, Brenda shared (January 30, 2009):

It was part presentation, lots of popular education activities and exercises. We did sculpting, we did drawing, we did umpteen million role-play situations, we did small group discussions, and we gave people opportunities to relate the topics to their own experiences. Then at the end, the last either session and a half or sometimes two sessions depending on how big the group was, they did their own facilitation into which they had to build the framework. They would be given 15 to 20 minutes—two of them, co-facilitators— to present a topic using our framework. So they could present any topic they wanted. In any way they wanted. We had [feedback] forms; it was all anonymous except my feedback and [Bezawit’s] feedback.

Some of the content was semi-structured, giving the women the tools they needed for running their own programs, and some of the program was organic and “came out of participants experience and sharing stories” (Bezawit, May 9, 2008). Through the training, learners grappled with creating safety and challenging oppressive behaviours in a group context safely and respectfully, while still holding people accountable and understanding and exposing group dynamics and why certain behaviours are problematic (Bezawit, May 9, 2008).
**Program Successes**

The overarching strength of the Train-the-Trainer Program was that it modelled an awareness of identity that resonates with both intersectionality and interlocking identities throughout. The objective of the Train-the-Trainer process was to have the women learners “not just use this as a support group, but be ready to see [themselves] in the process where [they] are facilitating a crisis” (Bezawit, May 9, 2008). As Brenda explained, “the facilitator training was basically working with group dynamics... we can't just teach the IFAAF framework, we have to provide aspect of the framework within” (Brenda, January 30, 2009).

This was a crucial aspect of the program; the educators modelled the IFAAF framework in all aspects of the process through using everyday experiences that occurred within the group. The educators had specific topics and tools they wanted to cover in order to equip the women learners for running their own programs. However, Brenda noted that sometimes issues or situations would arise in the group before the educators had arrived at the part of the process during which they had planned to teach those topics. In this regard, she reflected, “when an analysis is arrived at from an experience happening within the group, it works better, because then people get to put themselves in the picture and see wow, right” (Brenda, August 10, 2009). Also, Brenda related, it is more useful to apply knowledge to the situation at hand, or to behave from that knowledge, than to talk theoretically about social locations, group guidelines or to “workshop” participants (April 18, 2008).
Participant Selection to Enable an Analysis that Resonates with Intersectional and Interlocking Identities

One of the strengths of this learning process was that it was organized to include women of different social locations in order to raise issues that relate to women’s intersecting identities and the co-constructed nature of identities. The program was a closed group of 14-16 women participants, who were recruited, interviewed and selected. Bezawit noted (May 9, 2008), “it wasn’t over-weighed by White women, or it wasn’t over-weighed by one particular group of women of colour,” and that they brought “together a mix of people who had done varying degrees of work around understanding their experiences… Some who didn’t do any at all.”

Non-Neutral Framework of Learning Process

As Freire (1973) said, there is no such thing as a neutral education; to be neutral is to be on the side of the oppressor. Brenda and Bezawit’s stance on non-neutrality in terms of how they ran the training was another strength of the process. Brenda shared (Jan 30, 2009):

There was a sort of bottom line for accepting participants into the [Facilitator Train-the-Trainer program]. And the questions were designed to ensure that there was a buy-in to a feminist and anti-racism framework. […] We weren't going to debate the issue of racism in Canada... So it kind of flew in the face of, what is often an understanding among adult educators, [which is] to be truly democratic, anyone who wants to come in should be able to come in. […] [It] was relatively shocking, or unusual that we took the position that any facilitator must let her participants know where she's coming from.
Sharing the IFAAF from the outset and letting learners know there would be no “neutrality” in the group, set the tone for challenging. Part of this framework was the understanding that, as Brenda related, (August 10, 2009):

there will be challenging and confronting, so that when it happens, if it’s from the facilitator or one of the facilitators, it’s not a big surprise, you know? Even though it may not be handled well, at least participants know that these are the expectations.

I suspect that this clear articulation of purpose resulted in the normalization of the process of challenging, making it feel safer for women in the group, rather than the shaming process it could be in other environments. I feel this is a critical element from which many educators can learn.

**Challenging Enabled Understanding of Identity Co-Construction**

The use of challenging was successful, first of all, because the group was provided with tools to enable challenging to happen effectively. As Brenda stated (January 30, 2009):

the Facilitator Train-the-Trainer program was to work with dynamics and to challenge... to offer facilitators processes and formats for challenging inappropriate behaviours and inappropriate attitudes and to provide a safe, contained place for those dynamics to play out in such a way that we could then challenge them together as a group.

In the following sections, I outline the tools with which Brenda and Bezawit equipped their learners in their effort to ensure that these challenges were effective.
**Tools for Challenging**

*Use of guidelines to democratize challenges.*

The primary tool for challenging was the group guidelines, which were established by the group at the beginning of the process. The group guidelines stipulated that not all interventions need to, or should come from, the facilitator. This made it possible for anyone in the group to challenge, making the power distribution more equitable. This directive conveys the hope that others will address problematic comments made in group (Brenda, April 18, 2008).

*Instruction on how to give and receive challenges.*

As Brenda recalled (January 30, 2009), some of the guidance they provided on giving and receiving challenges included:

We would do a whole session on how do you effectively challenge someone in group who has been offensive. […] Challenging and confronting oppressive behaviours was a tool. There’s challenging and confronting someone else's oppressive behaviour and there's what happens when you're challenged; how do you respond. And so then we would talk about, don't be defensive; it takes a lot of courage for someone to challenge you. Give the person doing it the benefit of the doubt. Open your mind to hearing it. This is what the transformative piece is. Don't become defensive. Don't go into that mode of, “I didn't mean it, I was just kidding, you're taking me too seriously, and can’t you take a joke?”

I feel challenging is a very useful way to gain insight into one’s own behaviour. Brenda and Bezawit’s practice is quite instructive in using challenge and confronting oppressive behaviours *as a tool* in doing consciousness-raising work. They do not take for granted that this is a simple process; instead, they give instructions and guidance and then practice these tools
throughout the remainder of the sessions. This practice echoes Nina’s point that without the communications tools, skills and practice, it is unrealistic for processes that are confrontational at both a personal and interpersonal level to be productive and successful for learners. I think many groups can benefit from learning such fundamental tools for working across differences.

**Use of small groups for processing challenges.**

An additional practice that was useful from this training program was the use of small groups to process challenges. If a comment was made or behaviour exhibited that was particularly offensive, the educators instructed learners to get into small groups to work through what had happened. The composition of small groups would depend on the nature of the comment or behaviour. In one example, a racist comment was made and learners got into small groups according to race, which enabled women of colour to process their hurt and anger together and White women to help one another come to terms with the problematic nature of the comment and to grapple with taking responsibility.

Sometimes processing meant discussion; other times, the educators would use activities like sculpting an “a-ha” moment or drawing. These techniques helped to equalize communication among group members with varying fluencies in English and reveal how different people were feeling about what had been said. As Bezawit stated (November 12, 2009), “those are the ways we start dealing with intersectionality and dealing with interlocking oppressions, in a way that becomes very practical.”

In this practice, it was critical that there were White women in the group that had some awareness and that Brenda could guide this sub-group in gaining greater consciousness about
what had taken place. As Bezawit noted (May 9, 2008), this was a helpful process “to restore the safety, but also to ensure the challenge happen(s).”

In all examples, as mentioned previously, challenges should be approached as a difficult conversation that needs to be handled with compassion (Stone, Patton & Heen, 2000).

**Examples of Challenges that Invite an Understanding of Identity Co-Construction**

As mentioned previously, the interlocking identities framework was used to deconstruct the interactions of the group and to challenge participants’ behaviour, so that learners could develop an embodied understanding of the ways that power, privilege and oppression play out. This case study provides three distinct examples of how an understanding of identity co-construction can be promoted in ways that resonate with an interlocking identities framework. These examples include deconstructing race and racism that arose in the group, raising awareness of the dynamics playing out when White women cry in groups and gaining an understanding of the concept of safety in relation to privilege.

**Deconstructing race and racism.**

The first way that the Facilitator Train-the-Trainer process effectively promoted an understanding of identity co-construction was by taking everyday ways that racism was played out and deconstructing these interactions as a group. Bezawit first described the situation, as she stated (April 23, 2009):

There was a situation where one of the [learners] challenged me in a way that really was about, was I qualified enough to train her, [...] because by my appearance I looked very young. So I looked at her and I said, “Are you
questioning whether I'm experienced enough to have developed this and to be able to train you? Are you questioning my experience and my level in years and numbers of experience?” I said, “I'm over fifty; let me put it to you that way.” “Oh, well you look so good for fifty,” she said.

Bezawit then went on to describe how this interaction was turned into a learning moment for the whole group to process. She continued (Bezawit, April 23, 2009):

I took that up in the training process and I talked about the way that race works and the way that gender and sexuality work. […] By whose lenses are we determining age? We're looking through a White lens, because we understand a certain kind of appearance, based on particular chronological ages. We just have to look at our television. You know, you turn twenty and you start using anti-aging cream and all that. Yeah, like give me a break okay?

We have all these markers, but it's really through a White lens. It's not through my lens; it's not through an Asian lens. […] What I look like has been constructed within your mindset in a particular way to mean certain things and I've been constructed to mean that I couldn't possibly have experience. I couldn't be a teacher. I couldn't be an author. Neither could I be an educator. Certainly if I am an educator, I have to be trained or in training, okay? Somebody else must be the person who has trained me. I could not be the person who has trained the other person, right?

I think this is a very interesting and effective approach because it breaks down a problematic interaction and thought pattern and makes it transparent. Within this one interaction, learners can see how stereotypes and biases occur and the role they play in perpetuating them. Also Bezawit takes up this incident in a manner that targets the ways that individuals internalize systemic messages about race, age and experience, as opposed to simply condemning individuals and correcting their behaviour.
Deconstructing the dynamics of white women crying.

In Chapter Four, I discussed the way White women cry in groups and how this is damaging to marginalized women, especially Black women, who feel that they cannot cry and must play the role of caretaker. However, as with other problematic behaviours, Bezawit told the White learners who cried that she was going to bring the incident back to the group. In this way she turned the act of White women crying into a learning opportunity for everyone.

First Bezawit related (November 12, 2009) how she broke down this dynamic with the group:

Some people just cry at the drop of a hat and do not understand the impact that crying has for other women in the group who wouldn’t shed a drop of tears, but boy are they ever hurt! Are they ever affected by all of this, but the fact that they don’t cry, is now misconstrued as not requiring that kind of support! It has a lot to do with how White womanhood is constructed as needy and White women must be taken care of, they must be pampered. It’s a very middle class construction of White womanhood. It somehow has been defused through society and a lot of White women have had access to that in a way that other women of colour and other women may not.

After breaking down the dynamics at play, Bezawit would pose direct questions and challenges to her learners, to help them integrate this learning. She explained (April 23, 2009):

I take up the crying and say, “When you [cry], this is how you position me. This is how you construct me.” […] I said, “You're working with a facilitator of colour, a Black facilitator. If something comes up in the group and you cry, what are you expecting of your co-facilitator? What position are you putting her in?” And [I ask them to] consider the roles Black women in particular have been put in, in
relation to White women as mammies, as protectors. “Don't be putting your facilitator in that position. Something comes up in the group; you go deal with it on your own. Don't even let her see you shed a tear.”

Bezawit then reflected (November 12, 2009) on the outcomes of this process:

Actually people got it - that certain people get to cry. […] I think some people resist it, but I think most people in the group come across, they get that it is systemic, once you explain to them.

To further underline the responsibility of the learners as they are preparing to become facilitators of their own processes, Brenda includes crying as part of the ground rules. As she mentioned (August 10, 2009), “I start the group by saying ‘There will be no crying as a result of any discomfort you might be feeling.’”

I appreciate how this analysis becomes a tool for learners to understand themselves and their roles as co-facilitators, as well as a tool they could use to understand the dynamics at play when they went on to lead their own women’s self-help group processes. However, I think that shutting down learners’ emotions is insensitive, regardless of the woman’s identity. I feel that the imposition of this guideline parallels patriarchal culture in its effort to rationalize all aspects of the human spirit.

Pema Chodron and bell hooks (1997) make an argument for the importance of compassion and embracing emotion. Chodron states:

A lot of having compassion toward oneself is staying with the initial thought or arising of emotion. This means that when you see yourself being aggressive, or stuck in self-pity, or whatever it might be, then you train again and again in not adding things on top of that—guilt or self-justification or any further negativities. You work on not spinning off and on being kinder toward the human condition as you see it in yourself. […] So I feel the whole thing comes down to being very, very attuned to one's emotions—to seeing how one is attached to the pleasant and
has an aversion to what is painful. You work again and again on trying to discover how to get unhooked, to open and soften rather than to tighten and close down (1997, pg 1).

I think this is a valuable insight; yet it ignores the dynamics Bezawit and Brenda point out in terms of who has historically had access to crying and why. According to Bezawit and Brenda, if crying is encouraged, this sets up women of colour on two fronts; they are charged with the role of taking care of White women who have oppressed them, and they give away their power when they let White women see them cry. Women’s consciousness-raising processes do need to break down the barriers, but not at the expense of women of colour who are too likely to be the ones who pay.

However, I think that prohibiting White women from crying creates a chill effect around emoting in general. As many feminist theorists have noted, working with feelings is a cornerstone to consciousness-raising (hooks, 1994, Fisher, 1981, Boler, 1999, Doerge, 1992, Reger, 2004 and Sarachild, 2000). In fact, as Megan Boler (1999) argues, women expressing emotions represents “a site of political resistance and transformation of gender oppression” (pg 109). Ideally, women of colour who cry in groups need to experience greater acceptance (both from others and themselves), and White women need to be able to cry in a way that does not dominate the rest of the group.

One possible way to set the stage for crying is to discuss and deconstruct the race and power dynamic associated with crying during the initial group conversation to frame and establish ground rules. If problematic behaviours arise that creates moments when women of colour may need to cry but are stifled or unable, this dynamic should be named and explored. Similarly, if a White women cries in a way that dominates the group and avoids taking
responsibility for an oppressive behaviour, this needs to be named and addressed. In either case, educators must keep an eye on the dynamics and, if the need arises, move learners into small identity-based caucus groups in separate break out spaces to process what has happened and to support one another. As well, it would be helpful to have additional private spaces where learners can take self-imposed “time outs” during the learning process, as Jenny Horsman (1999) has advocated in her practice with women who have experienced violence.

Indeed, educators have long struggled with the task of creating a climate where women can emote freely and responsibly. While educators often seek out techniques and solutions, the tension is ever present and cannot necessarily be rectified through learning practices or facilitation techniques alone. Acknowledging these issues and raising questions about the dynamics at play as situations arise is an important first step that breaks the silence that normally surrounds such dynamics.

**Challenging privileged notions of safety.**

This process also invited an analysis of the co-construction of identity and oppression in its examination of privilege. As mentioned in Chapter Four, learners with privilege often say they are unsafe and use this as an avoidance technique. I see safety and discomfort as socially negotiated terms. Based on privileged aspects of identity, some women feel “unsafe” because of the relative safety they feel in most other realms in their lives most of the time. For others with more marginalized social locations, this same experience is a discomfort, not a real threat to safety or survival.

In her practice, Bezawit reframed safety for a learner who was using lack of safety as a way to “race towards innocence” based on her privilege. Bezawit pointed out that the learner was
actually feeling discomfort. She stressed that discomfort was integral to learning, while noting that learners needed to remain in discomfort and not shut down or become defensive.

Bezawit shared her approach to processing this in the group, as she said (April 23, 2009):

We say, “Okay, you know what you experienced is discomfort. Let's talk about discomfort. Let's talk about what that means. Let's talk about what you are feeling and why you're feeling that this is unsafe.” So let's break up into groups. Let's break up in a couple of groups and let's discuss that in our group. Talk about why you think this is a lack of safety, versus that of discomfort. […] Why do you see this as a lack of safety as opposed to, “I'm uncomfortable; There’s discomfort here because I've been challenged.” And this is what discomfort means, this is how it feels and this is what we take up as a learning tool. This is what we take up and we make it into a learning. It's okay to have discomfort. All of us feel discomfort if we're challenged to a certain extent because we feel like, "Oh my God, how could I have said that or done that,” right? But rather than jumping to the point of getting all up in arms. You know, like I had a conversation with my cousin, for an example. She did something to me that was inappropriate and I say, “This is not appropriate.” And rather than her taking responsibility, […] she jumped into this defensive mood and she can't hear anything.

She added (November 12, 2009), addressing me as a woman with privilege:

If you feel unsafe, I think that what you’re feeling is discomfort and you’re being defensive. And nothing is wrong with discomfort, right, because when you are challenged, you’re supposed to feel discomfort… if you go into the mode of defensiveness where you shut down, then that’s a problem. The problem is not to shut down, the thing is to keep moving that.

In this way, the Facilitator Train-the-Trainer process framed the feeling of discomfort as a learning experience. For example, Bezawit said (April 23, 2009):
It’s necessary to feel discomfort. Like putting a group together - you know when I tell people, “Well sit where you wouldn't normally sit,” that's already shifting. It's challenging them to know that you've got to have some discomfort. This is a process where discomfort is going to come up. And we build safety around those discomforts. That's how we build safety.

I appreciate that the educators build in discomfort in this way. Although it went beyond the scope of our discussion and may already be part of what Bezawit and Brenda do with groups, I would advocate that educators gradually introduce different aspects of identity or analysis about social locations that may produce discomfort in order to increase learning. This would enable learners to continually challenge themselves through handling increasingly difficult discomforts during the course of the learning process. I would also suggest that educators have periodic check-ins with the group and monitor how learners are processing different situations.

**Conclusion Case Study #1**

What impressed me about this case study was the systematic yet organic way that everyday experiences were used to instruct women learners on the IFAAF. Practices that highlighted and taught about women’s intersecting identities and the co-constituted nature of identities were consistently present in a way that made it possible for the women learners to apply this knowledge to their lives immediately, as well as use it with other learners in the support groups and programs they would go on to run.

The process Bezawit and Brenda used which resonated with these frameworks had various stages. As a first step, the challenge began with Bezawit (directly or indirectly) pointing out certain privileged aspects of a learner’s identity. By dissecting this aspect of a learner’s
identity (and not allowing the learner to “race towards innocence” in order to escape and hide behind another identity), Bezawit is demanding an understanding of women’s intersectional identities. As a second step, Bezawit asked the learners to examine privileged aspects of their social locations in relation to those of other women in the group, and to consider how these aspects are manifesting oppression for others. In doing so, Bezawit’s practice resonates with the concept of identity co-construction. So, in order for learners to then take on the challenge, an understanding of how identities are co-constituted with those of other individuals is provoked.

This example made me realize that the practices of challenging privilege and using everyday experiences necessarily draw on both the idea of intersecting identities and the co-constituted nature of identities at the same time. Intersectionality helps learners to understand the complexity of identities at an individual level, while interlocking identities helps learners to see how individuals’ identities are shaped by relationships between people, at a systemic level.

More liberal approaches that only examine identity as made up of multiple social locations may consider exploring this aspect of intersectionality to be sufficient on its own within a learning process. I feel that taking up intersectionality in this way makes the learning process an academic exercise of partitioning off social locations. Unless the educator evokes ideas of an individual’s multiple consciousness and social locations and the co-constructed nature of oppressions between individuals and within larger society, I do not think the learning process goes far enough in enabling learners to effectively navigate the dynamics of difference that takes place in their everyday lives.
Case Study #2 – Mika’s Reclaiming Indigenous Feminisms Project

Indigenous feminism articulates critiques of gender oppression and violence by centering on an analysis and politics that is decolonizing and pro-sovereignty (see Maracle, 1996 & Smith, 2005a). As Jennifer Nez Denetdale describes:

A critical Indigenous feminist perspective […] shed[s] light on two powerful forms of colonization still in play. First, […] the role of gender violence during the conquest must be acknowledged before the process of decolonization can be fully embraced. Secondly, […] the imposition of heteronormative European gender norms has created an atmosphere of sexism, intolerance, and violence in Native communities that is, in effect, an embodiment of the colonial agenda.

The Reclaiming Indigenous Feminisms Project (RIFP) embraced this understanding of the feminisms and colonialism, and worked towards enabling others to consider these insights.

Process Overview

The Reclaiming Indigenous Feminisms Project (RIFP) was open to all women, and drew women from various First Nations communities who were either within or close by to the urban Ontario setting where the process took place. Women who represented a variety of other cultural and national backgrounds, as well as varying abilities also participated. Everybody who attended had an interest in both contemporary Aboriginal culture and feminisms. The program took place over several consecutive days and over 30 women participated.

The RIFP was created by an Indigenous organization with the support of other community organizations. The process aimed to create an understanding of Indigenous feminism, explore what feminism looks like today, grapple with the perpetuation of colonial values and notions within mainstream feminism and actualize what anti-racist feminism really
means (Mika, April 12, 2009). There was a team of four facilitators leading the process, so that
the larger group could be broken down into smaller sub-groups. Mika oversaw the whole
process.

The Educator

Mika identifies as a working class First Nations woman of mixed heritage in her 20s and
as Two Spirited.\textsuperscript{28} She identifies as an Indigenous Feminist. Mika has an undergraduate degree,
but she feels that she received all of her teachings within her various communities.

Mika’s pedagogy was not just informed by her social locations but emanated from her
social locations. She shared (March 24, 2009):

I think it's important to identify as an Indigenous feminist. People think it's hard to
identify as a feminist; well, I think it's even more difficult in a community that's
supposed to be so women focused that it's dangerous to do that and you get
ostracized. […] People start to point the traditional finger like, "What you're
doing is not traditional." I hear that all the time. […] So, my identity politics have
a lot to do with that, and I'm not really concerned with where I fit in; I'm
concerned more about doing what needs to be done and making sure that I survive
my identity in the process because I don't want it to get to a point where it's one or
the other. It's a lonely place to be, not a popular place to be particularly. I can
count on my fingers the people I know who are really intersecting indigenaity and
Indigenous knowledge.

Mika's disillusionment with mainstream women’s movements also informs her outlook. She
reflected (April 20, 2009):

\textsuperscript{28} Two Spirit refers to an individual whose body houses a masculine and a feminine spirit at the same time. A two
Spirit person can fulfill many different traditional gender roles.
Technically speaking, if we are doing what we say we do, I should be able to go to a women’s event, by myself, not know anybody and come out making friends with everybody. But what happens is, I will go and nobody will talk to me because I’m not part of their space, or their collective, or whatever. This [is] constant [in] the way we approach stuff. You stereotypically think that men are just buddy-buddy with everybody and there are so many things that have to happen for somebody to talk to me even, right.

This disillusionment also fuels Mika desire for a feminism that centres on Indigenous ways of knowing. She commented (April 20, 2009):

I think it’s important to remember that people always want peace and unity, but sometimes it’s at the price of people being invisibilized or erased, right? So, that’s really important for us to manage and remember that we don’t want [that] in the name of unity or peace and sisterhood.

Program Successes

Elders’ Room

Learning processes often attempt to acknowledge a First Nations’ perspective with the addition of activities like smudging and acknowledging the land we are standing on. The RIFP, however, embodied a First Nations’ approach by inviting elders from the community to be present and to provide guidance for learners during the process. The elders were in a separate space so that learners could leave the process at any time to go speak with them about the experience (March 24, 2009). Mika explained (April 20, 2009):

Well, it’s a normal thing in First Nations’ spaces. There’s always an elders’ room whenever I’ve gone to a First Nations conference or gathering, which I think is cool, because that’s the elders’ role, it’s part of their job. I think part of the reason
that they lost their job, is because they’re not being asked to do stuff like that anymore. For some people, who this is not normal for, it was like, wow, that there’s this incredible means of support.

In this way, having an elders' room was a way to integrate Indigenous feminisms, as opposed to discussing it in the abstract.

**Intersectionality Praxis Through Intergenerational Group Work**

Throughout the process, there was a great deal of focus on creating connections across differences. For example, much of the learning process was anchored in small sub-groups that were comprised of women representing four different generations: early Indigenous feminism (before 1940), first wave (1940 to 1965), second wave (1965 to 1985) and third wave (1985 to the present) feminism. These groupings were designed to create identification across differences and to raise the intergenerational nature of Indigenous feminisms. While there were not enough women in attendance to represent all generations in each group, Mika felt that the effort to make the groups intergenerational was useful “because they could problem solve with intergenerational people and across backgrounds and places where people were coming from” (April 20, 2009).

This focus on learning across generational differences was also reinforced by the use of a “jigsaw” report back, where one member of each sub-group meets to form a new sub-group and shares the learning from their initial group discussion. This gave the women a chance to connect with different women throughout the process and to hear new perspectives on the topic of feminisms (Mika, March 24, 2009). Mika noted that the format “brought the understanding that we need everybody present; everybody's opinions matter” (March 24, 2009).
Understanding the Ways Identity is Co-Constructed Through Deconstructing Colonialism

Mika’s exploration of the dynamics of colonialism was especially effective in helping learners to understand how one person’s privileged identity could co-constitute another’s identity of oppression. She started the process by helping learners to understand the importance of looking at colonization. She noted (April 20, 2009) that “people will tokenize it in the beginning [thinking] we’re just doing this because there are Native people here.”

Mika helped learners to see how the dynamics of colonization are enacted in the present day and to consider how they are implicated in these dynamics. She did this by connecting women’s issues and colonization; for example, by talking about changes in women-centred health care.

One example of this connection is the change in the way in which women approach childbirth. Traditionally women gave birth in their own communities with the support of women elders and midwives. Now, women are taught to distrust traditional knowledge and practice and instead travel outside of their communities to give birth in hospitals where their bodies and birth experience is medicalized and standardized through Western practices. Mika reflected on how this connection between women and colonization emerged in the workshop as she stated (April 20, 2009):

«It was interesting, because you could see as a result of colonization […] one of the issues for women today was not being able to birth babies in their own community, with a midwife. They felt like they had to go to a hospital. You could see that link right there. And people were, like, “oh, shit, like, wow.” You can say general statements all the time, but people aren’t able to actually see how [colonization] is happening.»
Mika noted that, “when they’re forced to look at women’s issues, or women and colonization, it’s like, ‘oh shit; it’s affecting all of us’” (April 20, 2009).

I believe this was effective example because it drew on the issue of birth, which is an issue that is a common experience for many women. To me, this means that women take these realities for granted and would not think to name the ways in which they are colonized subjects or colonizers; meanwhile, these realities we deal with on a daily basis.

**Challenging Enabled Understanding of Identity Co-Construction**

The RIFP developed challenges to introduce the subsequent issue of how learners have different lived experiences vis-à-vis colonization based on their intersecting social locations. As with the Facilitator Train-the-Trainer program, Mika used challenges as a way to enable an understanding of identity co-construction in a way that resonated with the interlocking identities framework. Her approach was unique in terms of how guidelines were framed around Indigenous rights and through the ways in which challenges were processed by the group. The following section outlines the most effective tools and the approaches that she utilized.

**Tools for Challenging**

*Differently-located team of facilitators.*

As mentioned above, this learning process was led by a team of four facilitators, who represented different social locations. These four educators helped bring different perspectives to what was happening in the group. As Mika noted (April 20, 2009), “Looking at it with a few
other facilitators helps to balance [our perceptions of] what was inappropriate quote unquote, or what’s not.”

**Guidelines as a way to see how we co-construct.**

The group guidelines were referred to as “self determination bill of rights for people” (March 24, 2009). One guideline stated that drawing on the concept of reverse racism was not acceptable (April 20, 2009). This set the tone for an anti-oppressive process. It also provided a tool to identify when privileged learners tried to avoid confronting their privilege by “racing to innocence” through evoking “reverse racism” and attempting to construct themselves as victims in the situation.

To enable an equitable process, the group also used a separate Indigenous women’s agreement, where Indigenous women learners identified the behaviours that they wanted and did not want to experience during the learning process. Making this agreement highlighted the different lived realities of learners in the group and made transparent the ways that different behaviours are experienced. This helped to raise learners’ awareness of their multiple and interrelated identities. I imagine making the Indigenous women’s agreement also illuminated the role others’ inappropriate behaviours play in the marginalization of Indigenous women.

**Group processing of challenges.**

Challenges were welcomed throughout the RIFP process. To make a challenge, group members wrote a post-it note that related to a comment or behaviour that the learner in question
felt was disrespectful. This note was posted on the challenge wall either by the person who experienced it or someone they designated to post it for them (April 20, 2009).

One of the most interesting, and I feel effective, aspects of this learning process was the way in which these challenges were processed. Periodically throughout the process, the educators asked the entire group to look at the behaviours that learners had posted on the wall. At that time, the intergenerational sub-groups tried to interpret and look for connections between all the “disrespects.” As Mika recounted (April 20, 2009):

A lot of times you couldn’t relate [to what was posted]. We would ask [the learners] to take a sheet of flip chart paper and then find a way to put them together and find the link. So we really encouraged people to be artistic. So if you had, five post-it notes, you want to look at how they’re connected, or disconnected.

Afterwards, each sub-group presented its ideas back to the entire group to get feedback. Mika explained (April 20, 2009):

We would ask them to present it to the whole group and offer how they think that it should be dealt with. […] It was really interesting to see people validate each other like that. Like, I can see where that’s coming from, right? Or some groups got it totally wrong. Because you can put up a sentence or two, but a sentence is so interpretive. […] You would have to look at the post-it note and force yourself to think - how is this happening in this space? And people didn’t always have an answer. […] And sometimes people would pipe up and say, “Well, I think this is what they were speaking about,” and you don’t know if that was the person who actually said it or wrote it or not, right?

This approach helped learners to grapple with how behaviour impacted other learners without making the disrespected person more vulnerable. This was effective because the learner
who was hurt was able to maintain her anonymity while the challenge was being processed. Far too often, a learner who has already been hurt as a result of her marginalized social locations is re-injured in challenging processes that are meant to be about anti-oppression.

This approach was also effective because it provided a way for the learner who acted oppressively to participate in processing the challenge to her behaviour while similarly remaining anonymous. This anonymity would prevent her from becoming defensive and assist her in taking responsibility and avoiding similar behaviours in the future.

Educators are usually faced with a choice between following through with a challenge at the risk of hurting someone and avoiding challenges altogether. This process demonstrates a very elegant way out of this dilemma.

**Support to Actions**

The final way that intersectionality and interlocking identities were taken up through this learning process was in Mika’s astute analysis of how identity impacts the ways in which action was conceptualized and supported. When speaking of activism, Mika suggested that broad, systemic responses to issues are often valued over everyday action. She reflected (April 20, 2009) on this bias that existed during the workshop:

The actions have to be so big and they have to have this much effect. Not looking at valuing actions at home, and valuing actions that are stereotypically seen as small, but have huge implications.

She also argued that what should be considered an appropriate action depends on an individual’s locations and background. Mika said (April 20, 2009):
Coming from a small community it isn’t safe to do an action. You’re not in a space where people are going to support you to do that. We haven’t got past the moment where we’re willing to understand it’s not just about self confidence; it’s about social confidence. And that we could have better dialogues if we stopped putting so much blame on individuals for not measuring up. […] We need to look at what’s preventing or prohibiting or limiting people within a social setting... Because if you’re in a small community and you don’t have the means, financially or psychologically, to carry something out, it’s setting people up to fail, right?

These observations reflect a sensitive and well-developed analysis of action that takes community/cultural context into account when thinking about what social change means. This analysis reveals the ways in which dominant perspectives on action are alienating to many. I think it would be useful for all educators working for social change to consider this perspective when conceptualizing action with learners.

**Conclusion for Case Study #2**

Mika’s Reclaiming Indigenous Feminisms Project (RIFP) makes a valuable contribution that aids educators’ thinking about the intersections of indigenity within non-credit feminist learning processes. I was impressed by Mika’s facilitation of an inclusive learning process that connected women learners from a wide range of social locations. I especially appreciated the ways in which her approaches made the concept of colonization and the act of decolonizing accessible. Mika accessed an analysis of power differentials by helping the group to understand how systemic power operates and, in turn, shapes individuals’ identity formation.
Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I recounted two case studies that show particularly effective pedagogies and practices. The Facilitator Train-The-Trainer and the Reclaiming Indigenous Feminisms Project were chosen because each was successful at engaging learners to develop insight into the complex power dynamics embedded in their social locations. The educators, Bezawit, Brenda and Mika, deconstructed the tensions and conflict embedded in everyday interactions and led learners in surfacing conflict and engaging in challenging and being challenged. These practices equipped learners with tools useful for navigating power in their everyday lives. It is also interesting to note that the approaches that Bea and Bezawit utilized to raising learners’ consciousness surfaced understandings of identity, power and oppression similar to those articulated through intersectionality and interlocking identities frameworks.

Mika’s preference was to begin the group’s analysis from a systemic perspective and to look for ways that different social, political and economic systems impacted on the personal. Meanwhile, Brenda and Bezawit start analysis at the personal level and uncover ways that personal and interpersonal dynamics manifest at the systemic level. Despite their differences, each learning process offers valuable lessons that feminist educators can borrow and adapt to their own contexts. As mentioned in Chapter Five, I feel the starting point is not nearly as important as ensuring that both the personal and the systemic are held within learners understandings simultaneously, and that educators promote a dialectic conversation between each perspective.

In both cases, it is interesting to note that Mika, Brenda and Bezawit’s draw on and utilize interactions and dynamics that were described in Chapter Four as barriers and challenges
within the learning process. To a large degree, I believe that these educators learning processes were particularly successful because they are aware of and able to work with the reality of their groups’ dynamics. They embrace these as a starting point rather than hoping for more ideal conditions.

Finally, the greatest learning for me in this chapter relates to how educators promoted understandings of identity that resonated with an intersectional or interlocking oppression analysis. In Chapter Five, educators advocated for starting with one aspect of identity and expanding the analysis from there. I think through focusing on addressing racism (or colonialism) in these case studies, the educators demonstrate an effective first step. Once racism (or colonialism) has been effectively named and addressed, the educators can use similar approach to consider addition facets of identity, thereby gradually complexifying the learners’ analysis.

While this laddered approach may hypothetically be effective, it represents a shortcoming: these case studies did not address the co-mounted nature of oppressions in a way that took up social locations beyond race. This deficiency indicates that educators may not give other social locations the same attention, and that utilizing an interlocking identities framework that takes up multiple aspects of identity may be possible to conceptualize in theory, but impossible to uphold in practice.

This finding highlights the need for further work which looks at case studies that illustrate how educators can take up aspects of identity beyond race, and which ideally takes up multiple aspects of identity at the same time.
CHAPTER SEVEN:
SUGGESTED PEDAGOGIES AND PRACTICES WHICH TAKE UP
INTERSECTIONALITY AND INTERLOCKING IDENTITIES FRAMEWORKS

Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter One, I was inspired to do this research in order to provide approaches and frameworks for thinking through how to conduct consciousness-raising processes which will enable women learners to effectively understand and address differences between them. To do this, it was important to me that the starting point be learning contexts that value women’s solidarity.

I chose to include this chapter to address the gaps in the story the data was telling. In this chapter, I reflect on the data from the educators’ responses during interviews and focus groups and then draw on my own experiences in order to elaborate on effective pedagogies and practices for furthering the work of educators facilitating women’s consciousness-raising around issues of identity and power in non-credit contexts. This chapter is also motivated by my desire to bring together the educators’ experience and knowledge on pedagogies and practices (some of which I have already outlined) in designing consciousness-raising processes for women.

This chapter builds on Chapters Four, Five and Six where I outlined how educators recognize the concepts of intersectionality and interlocking identities in their education practices and the resulting successful pedagogies and practices respectively. As mentioned in Chapter Six, I consider successful pedagogies and practices to be those where the educator draws on and engages with everyday interactions as a source for learning, does not back away from discomfort or conflict, gives depth to issues, provides ways to think about complexity and encourages insight not just action.
This chapter begins with a proposal of learning pedagogies and practices that would enable feminist educators to successfully raise women’s consciousness around issues of identity and power. These pedagogies and practices are rooted in my own experience as an educator and synthesize many of the findings from this research.

Following the overview of these pedagogies and practices, I reflect on and offer insights to assist in navigating the tensions that arise in facilitating consciousness-raising processes.

**Suggested Pedagogies and Practices in Successful Women’s Non-Credit Learning Processes**

In the previous chapters, I have reviewed and made sense of what I learned from the interview and focus group data. In this chapter, I explain overall what learning processes or pedagogies I found to be useful (or not) from what I learned while conducting this research.

Here, I delineate what I see as the key elements and practices required for a successful praxis that enables women learners to grapple with and become conscious of issues of identity and power. In this exploration, I outline my ideas in a sequence of pedagogies and practices that I believe would be successful. The sequence incorporates the basic, well known recommendations that the feminist educators made in this research, such as having a co-facilitator, a group of no more than 16 learners, relative autonomy over the design, a process that involves 10 or more meetings of 3 hours each, and a physical set up that does not hinder interactions.

While no learning process should be considered a step-by-step procedure, I have arranged these pedagogies and practices in an order that mirrors the general progression of a learning process. This order begins with factors that an educator should take into account while designing
the process, followed by different issues that an educator should consider as the group is established, trust is built and learners engage in deeper levels of analysis during the facilitation of a learning process.

**Educators Personal Work as Foundational**

In order to be successful in leading these learning processes, an educator must have facilitation and process design skills, as well as a solid analytical grounding, which includes being cognizant of their own social locations. As mentioned previously, praxis is important for effective facilitation and self-reflexivity; an educator’s ability to reflect on her actions and position in the world is a key component of this praxis. I believe an educator’s self awareness, awareness of herself in relation to others and awareness of herself in a historical context are cornerstones to any consciousness-raising process.

As Karl Marx noted (1938), “the educator must himself be educated.” Alma also believed (June 11, 2009), “you can't teach others past where you are.” This idea seems somewhat counter to the kind of approach Freire would advocate, which is that the educator and learner are co-learners who share in the process of learning together, even while there is not an equal relationship between them. However, I agree with Alma in the sense that educators can impede the consciousness-raising process for learners if they are uncomfortable or lack openness when exploring issues.

In terms of self-awareness, educators’ praxes are inextricably tied with their own personal practices and ways of being and are not solely about the techniques they employ or their stated political orientations. The issue of self-awareness is also strongly tied to educators’ social
locations. Educators’ social locations strongly inform lived realities and shape experience. These experiences will likely result in there being areas in which educators are not as cognizant of in terms of their analysis and ability to challenge (as in the examples given in Chapter Four). This kind of self awareness can be cultivated by paying attention to one’s own behaviour and emotions and becoming aware of what areas need development.

Educators must develop an awareness of themselves in relation to others in order to understand the ways in which they do and do not relate with learners’ experiences based on their social locations and lived experiences. This awareness will inform the areas that educators need to work on, as well as suggesting what group needs may require the assistance of a co-facilitator.

Some other important personal work in which educators can engage involves becoming knowledgeable about the historical context of their work, namely about colonial histories and the ongoing impact these histories have on present-day institutional practices and dominant ways of knowing. Critical race theory is one tool that can be instrumental in this learning. In group processes, an educator with an awareness of critical race theory will be better equipped to understand the interlocking histories of the learners who are present and to identify words, attitudes and behaviours that are problematic and reference the historical roots of these. Prepared with this insight, the educator can unpack how oppressive histories are being evoked.

For example as mentioned, Roberta illustrated (November 22, 2008) the oversexualisation of Black women is rooted in practices used to justify slavery, and the perpetuation of this stereotype continues to have wide-ranging impacts on everything from media images to the stigmatization of Black women living with AIDS or who are HIV positive.
Of course all other oppressions have historical roots that require unpacking and theoretical frameworks such as critical (dis)ability studies, queer theory, Jewish studies and diasporic and transcultural studies are instrumental to this work.

*Educators engage in personal healing.*

While an educator’s primary consideration needs to be how she outwardly enacts her social locations and politics, there must also be consideration given to how an educator engages in this work internally. As hooks reflects, one of Thich Nhat Hanh’s teachings is that “the practice of a healer, therapist, teacher or any helping professional should be directed toward him or herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people” (in hooks, 1994, p. 15).

As women, the educators are the subject of much primary and secondary trauma in society, an issue that feminist practitioners have thoroughly discussed (Burstow, 1992). This trauma can result in alienation for oneself, disassociation and depression. For these reasons I believe personal spiritual and healing through energy practices are crucial for educators’ wanting to sustain their work.

Roberta pointed out that healing and energy practices can have complex associations, when she said (January 23, 2009), “looking at the spiritual dimension is a very political thing.” Furthermore, Leela Fernandez notes, “in the world in which we currently live, it is a risky proposition to speak of politics and spirituality in the same breath” (2003, p 101). I am aware of

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29 Primary trauma refers to trauma one experiences directly, or first hand. For example, physical abuse would be a primary trauma.

30 Secondary trauma refers to trauma that is dispersed yet has a traumatic impact over time. For example, secondary trauma is experienced through living in society that is “unfriendly” towards women.
the risks, but making the links between politics and spirituality is critical and it is better to deal with the implications of these divides head on. To do otherwise is detrimental to consciousness-raising and political organizing.

This view is supported by many theorists and practitioners. Pat Cane (1994, 2000) of the organization Capacitar notes that equipping activists who had experienced trauma with the tools to heal themselves, such as Tai Chi, yoga, meditation and breath work, enabled them to sustain their movement participation. Similarly corporal, emotional and spiritual practices have been integrated by other educators with great success into social movement work with activists who have survived the civil war in Central America (Cabrera, 2002; Flores, et al., 2005). These are just a few of the options educators could consider.

Educators who do this work may find that they can facilitate their learning processes without being personally triggered or drained. Educators who are not triggered will be able to avoid over identifying with learners’ or confusing the learners’ learning journey with that of their own. Doing this personal work could also assist educators in seeing challenges beyond the ones that directly affect themselves and in accessing different lenses with which to analyse situations that occur.

Another benefit is the prevention of burn out. Educators should engage in healing practices so that they are mentally and physically prepared to engage deeply in their work and sustain their activism. Alma spoke about how she always raises the issue of self care with the women with whom she works and how no one is doing it. She noted that to be in this work for the long haul educators need to take care of themselves and that many educators/activists have left this work because they have burned out. She also cautioned that this burn out does not affect
women equally. Educators need to consider certain social locations are more susceptible to burn out (June 11, 2009). As Alma said (June 11, 2009):

   Social determinants of health say that if you belong to a certain race, if you belong to a certain gender, if you're a single mother your levels of stress have just exploded the thermometer.

   The extent to which the educator engages in this personal work creates the basis for every aspect of the learning process. The next concrete aspect to consider in the progression of designing and facilitating a learning process is defining the objectives of the learning process.

**Define Goals of the Learning Process**

The first step to a successful process is to define what the goals are. An important consideration in terms of establishing learning goals is the time available to conduct the learning process. This will dictate how deeply into the topic of anti-oppression an educator may choose to go. I agree with the perspective Nina shared, as she said (May 5, 2009):

   I'm not sure whether it's the best thing to have a topic like oppression and privilege for three hours and then move on to other things, to be honest. I mean that was the setup that we had, so we did what we could. But it's an enormous, enormous topic.

If there is an extensive amount of time available (for example 10 hours or more), educators can plan an extensive in-depth process. However, if time is more limited (between 3 and 10 hours), it would be wise to introduce the topic and then gauge at what level the group is ready to engage with anti-oppression. If time is quite limited (3 hours or less), I think it would be wise to rethink
the learning goals, introducing anti-oppression principles only at a cursory level as Nina elaborated on in Chapter Five.

**Expectations of Learners**

It is constructive to make the expectations of the learning process clear from the beginning, so that learners can make an informed decision before participating in the process. There is no such thing as a neutral learning process, and educators need to be clear about their agenda and goals.

It is particularly important to state expectations surrounding the issue of challenging. As discussed earlier, I think challenging is an essential practice for effectively addressing issues of identity and power. In order for challenging to be effective, educators should clearly articulate to the group at the time of recruiting that members any problematic behaviour will be challenged and participants will be asked to work through issues of oppression that occur or are raised during the learning process. If this expectation has not been outlined, the dynamics of challenges may seem like an ambush.

**Learners’ Recruitment**

If it is possible, pre-screening learners is a valuable practice. As Brenda and Bezawit illustrate in their case study, it is possible to have a richer, more profound discussion if the learners that have been selected to participate represent a range of social locations and experiences.
Cognizance of Entry Points of Differently-located Women

A critical aspect in these learning processes is being cognizant of women’s different entry points into the conversation at all times. Although I was expecting to hear about how different lived experiences create different entry points during this research, I was surprised by the extent of some of these variances. I expected to hear about situations such as Roberta’s story of the White woman who spoke about oppression in terms of not being able to go to summer camp in a group with working class women of African descent (June 12, 2009). Or educator’s anecdotes about the need to raise issues related to class with workers (Viv, May 9, 2008). Yet I was caught off guard by other stories.

It was particularly caught unexpected when Sam spoke of how difficult it is for women living with (dis)abilities to feel a part of women’s groups when they are typically not viewed as women, but only as (dis)abled (May 4, 2009). I think this was surprising to me because, as Sam noted; many spaces and processes are not accessible for (dis)abled women with mobility issues (May 4, 2009). As a result, I have not had the same exposure to the analysis she shared about (dis)abled women’s positioning in the world. This issue of not being seen as women also holds for Trans identified women, who are not always been seen as women. As Roberta noted (June 12, 2009), “there will be feminist women who think, ‘Hey, I don’t want transgendered women within the group.’”

These reflections speak to a difficulty in upholding the ideals of sisterhood in feminist practice. If learners are not recognized as women it will not be possible to find common ground. This recognition of learners’ disparate entry points should have a significant impact on how an educator envisages the starting point for their collective learning.
**Collectively Establish Ground Rules**

Ground rules are positive for a number of reasons. They allow learners to feel like their needs have been taken care of, particularly learners with a high need for organization in their learning environment. Such learners will be reassured when this agenda item has been covered.

Setting ground rules as a group enables learners to name what they would like to see happen (or not happen) in the learning space, so that they may participate as fully as possible. This is pro-active, as it makes all learners aware of what behaviours are expected of them and alerts the educator to the issues or behaviours that require attention if the learners are to feel comfortable and able to participate. In this way, the establishment of ground rules equips the educator with a tool for addressing offensive behaviours: namely, revisiting what was agreed on and calling learners on behaviours that are observed. For example, ground rules can stipulate that claims of “reverse racism” will not be tolerated, which gives the educators an opening to address any learner who is claiming to be discriminated against based on a privileged identity. Ground rules are also needed to structure the ways in which learners can challenge one another, in order to avoid inappropriate challenging that can be a barrier to learning. Ground rules can also be used to encourage democratic participation. For instance an educator could suggest to group members that if they normally talk a lot they should challenge themselves to listen more, and if they normally talk rarely to challenge themselves to talk more and encourage them to challenge the idea not the person.

The strengths of ground rules can also become their weaknesses. One drawback is that raising the issue of hurting one another with our behaviours can cause learners to self-censor and act “politically correct,” which stifles the sharing of ideas. For this reason, it is helpful to have
ground rules that encourage openness to differences of opinion. Regardless of how ground rules are introduced, establishing them can be seen by learners as insulting or belittling. Some learners feel that the guidelines for participation are obvious and unnecessary. Interestingly, I have frequently found that the learners who raise such concerns are those most likely to display problematic behaviours during the group process. With this in mind, ground rules can also be pro-active, as they alert the educator about those learners to whom they need to pay particular attention to in the group.

**Build Connection Between Women**

It is helpful for the learning process to start with a focus on connecting and finding ways to unite before moving on to discuss and address oppression. As mentioned, building connection between women learners early in the process is important, as it forms the basis of the work that will follow. For example, Tina mentioned (May 6, 2008) that she has used a practice where learners open the learning process by sharing a quote or object that has inspired them.

In addition to introductory and ice breaker activities, Alma used one practice called the “5 Whys” exercise, during which the learners repeat asking themselves “why” in relation to a question. Once the learner answers why to the initial question the learner then asks why of that answer and continue on in this fashion to get to a deeper level of understanding.

One example that Alma recounted from her group learning process began with the question, “why are you in a relationship?” One of the learner’s first answers was “for security.” The learner then asked herself “Why do I need security?” and so on. Alma reflected that this practice reveals deeper needs behind behaviours, as well as common needs amongst learners.
despite their different behaviours (June 11, 2009). I have used similar practices and found them quite effective.

Another practice I found interesting was a framework Alma introduces to groups to emphasize that we need to have all aspects of our lives in balance to be whole and to be effective in whatever work we are doing, especially if it involves caring for others (See Figure 9. PIES, four dimensions of an individual). This diagram shows an individual in balance, although learners may recognize that the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual slices of their own PIES diagram would be out of balance if they drew their own diagram.

![PIES Diagram](image)

*Figure 9. PIES, four dimensions of an individual.*

Alma also uses this diagram as a way to help learners understand themselves as spiritual and emotional beings, and through this process relate to the oneness of all humans. Alma found this in turn helps learners connect with each other and see commonalities in the group.

I think this approach could be very effective, provided that learners have the political analysis to understand the distinction Alma makes between spirituality and religion (religion being institutional and about power, and not necessarily about connection). As Roberta noted,
religions have often participated in colonization and therefore such organizations and their practices might not resonate with, or be empowering for, all women (January 23, 2009).

This approach relates to interlocking identities as well. Alma theorizes that if we are deficient, especially in the emotional and spiritual realms, this leads to behaviours that are “Othering” because we do not see ourselves in, or connected to, the Other. In this way, Alma had a different take from the other feminist educators on intersectionality or interlocking identities perspectives, which she sees as being:

More based on a physical and intellectual realm.[...] I feel that if we as a society focus a little bit more on the emotional and spiritual realm we would probably have less interlocking oppressions and all those other barriers (May 4, 2010).

I understand this comment to mean that through seeing our oneness less Othering will occur. This makes me think that theories alone do not achieve this. It also raises the issue of intersectionality or interlocking identities being taken up as only theoretical exercises that focus on dissecting and categorizing identities. Alma’s view is that women can find a great deal of commonality through focusing on themselves as emotional and spiritual beings (June 11, 2009). I agree that emotional and spiritual realms are important and that frequently such aspects are considered insignificant by educators with an activist orientation. However, the frameworks of intersectionality and interlocking identities and the emotional and spiritual realms are not mutually exclusive.

This difference in opinion speaks to the different ways in which a theory can be taken up. At their best, the recognition of difference, power and oppression among women speaks to differently-situated women’s fractured experiences and provide a way to conceptualize their unique embodied knowledges which include the spiritual and emotional dimensions. In addition
to articulating an intersectional perspective, Hill-Collins notes that there is a deep connection between spirituality, sexuality, emotion, and women’s power (2004). Educators who embrace embodied knowledges and integrate these ways of knowing in the theories of intersectionality and interlocking identities will be better equipped to use these ideas in praxis. As hooks argues, this is about educators striving for a “union of mind, body, and spirit” as well as having a “focus on practice in conjunction with contemplation” (1994, p. 14).

In effect, bringing a more human and holistic element to intersectionality and interlocking identities, as Alma’s practice calls for, could realign these feminist theories with community needs.

**Give Guidance for Challenging**

As mentioned previously, challenging is a very effective way to raise consciousness about women’s differences. As Roberta argued (August 10, 2009):

We have to interrupt the racism, the classism, the heterosexism. To me it’s a **must**. […] I think it has to happen, because if we’re not, then what are we really doing in terms of supporting all the systems that are creating this violence against the women that come to our groups? To me, we’re not being responsible, we’re not being accountable, and we’re also being dangerous. It’s dangerous **not** to deal with violence that happens within the groups.

Educators need to be clear before a learner joins that challenges will happen in the group, and to discuss how challenges can happen most effectively when the group makes its collective guidelines during the first session. It is also important for the educators to spend time guiding learners in how and when to challenge one another in an effective way. As Brenda and Bezawit
demonstrated, this can be done by explaining how to frame a challenge and providing reminders about remaining open when one is challenged.

If possible, educators should model several challenges before the group begins taking on greater leadership in initiating challenges. For example, Bezawit could have described how she challenged a learner about crying in a previous group. Or, if the opportunity presents itself, the educator could challenge a learner on an issue that arises early on in the group and then deconstruct the way she went about executing that challenge. This modelling could help curtail the incidence of inappropriate challenges. Educators may also consider making time to debrief as a group after a challenge, in order to draw out learnings from the incident.

Although challenging can result in critical learning, an educator should not rely on addressing challenges as a sole means for providing lessons. When the group is in a position to require one of its members to be challenged, this means that some women are hurt and marginalized by problematic behaviours, while other women learn to take responsibility for privileged aspects of their social locations “off the backs” of the marginalized women. This means that the privileged women are the main ones to benefit from any learning in this scenario. Instead, the educator should provide frameworks and insights to lessen the incidence of problematic behaviour. Then, if problematic behaviour still surfaces, the educator needs to address what has come up and use the process of challenging that has been introduced.

**Work With Learners’ Feelings**

Consciousness-raising practices regard and privilege personal feelings as ways of knowing. In fact, feminists have argued that:
to fail to incorporate (feelings, senses, relationship to nature and spirit) into a liberating education not only ignores the way that women tend to learn about the world, but could lead only to a limited and fragmented social transformation (Doerge, 1992, p. 2).

Learning processes are rooted in learners’ personal experiences and social locations and, as such, are highly personal. As Tina mentioned (July 3, 2009), it is helpful to warn learners that the learning process will involve difficult emotional work. Roberta also insisted on the importance of grounding before delving into difficult subject matter because she noticed learners being triggered, even in her non-therapeutic groups (June 12, 2009). For example, it is a good idea to use check-ins at the beginning and end of the session, or after any significant incident during group discussion that may have triggered learners.

Educators must also respect and validate learners’ feelings throughout the process in order to build trust and to normalize what they are experiencing. Educators may choose to draw on their own experiences and model vulnerability where it would aid the learners’ process.

Finally, it is critical in a successful practice that educators are prepared to assist learners in working through feelings that neither the educator nor the learners are equipped to handle. This preparation involves having referrals on hand to share and informing learners about what resources are available to them beyond the session. Roberta noted (June 12, 2009) that she would approach a group by saying:

“Hey, the things that we’re talking about can trigger people, and if you are triggered, come talk to me to get resources.” If I don’t say that, to me that’s dangerous. And that happens a lot within the groups that I’ve experienced as a

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31Grounding involves focused connection with the sensory world in a way that “changes the channel” from traumatic memories to present-day stimuli, as a means of maintaining emotional safety. For example, the use of olfactory stimuli as grounding activates the most immediate and the least verbally mediated sensory modality, competing with the sensory memories represented in re-experiencing” (Schein, et al. 2006, p. 531).
learner. You go, and [educators] have no clue of how they’re triggering people around them.

**Socially Locate**

After the ground rules, it is helpful to start with exercises that require learners to socially locate themselves. For example, learners create a map that depicts all the facets of their identities, roles and power.

The primary value of conducting processes to socially locate is not only to reveal what the learners bring to the learning process or help them to learn about themselves, but to raise the subject of identity starting from a point at which the learners are comfortable and familiar.

This helps the educator know how comfortable learners are with the topic, how self-aware they are, what language resonates with them on the topic and who may be using technical language that may obfuscate the fact that they are not as well versed in practice. In other words, this type of exercise helps educators to envision their starting point (see *Figure 6. Popular education spiral*).

I think it is best if the educator models how to socially locate. As Alma’s mentioned, she always goes first and socially locates herself in this type of activity (March 7, 2008). This creates comfort and makes concrete what may be an obscure exercise for learners. Another benefit of modelling how to socially locate is that educators are able to reveal their humanness. For example, Alma said that by coming out to learners she models strength in vulnerability at the same time as she allies herself with those in the group who may need an ally (March 7, 2008).

Finally, I agree with Alma’s view that activities to socially locate can be taken further and become a tool for working through both privilege and oppression. An educator can
encourage privileged learners to socially locate themselves, thus highlighting the areas where these learners are less comfortable, and where they are likely to be making women in the group feel like outsiders, or “Othering” them (May 4, 2010). As Alma reflected, (May 4, 2010), as an educator she could work with privileged learners to see:

The communities [they] probably need to be working with and understanding. [...] Instead of having guilt, go out and understand what has happened in the past and what has led [them] to the point of where [they] are right now in relation to marginalized groups. Because the guilt and the defensiveness only makes the oppression even deeper because [they] choose to be blind or chose to make oppression invisible, because [theirs] becomes a bigger concerns. [Their] feelings yet again become the agenda.

Conversely, activities to socially locate also increase awareness for a learner who experiences oppression. In this case, when one socially locates, they will reveal “the oppressions they have to face because of who they are” (Alma, May 4, 2010).

While activities to socially locate often happens at the beginning of learning practices, I think such practices should be revisited throughout the learning process, as the group continues to develop deeper levels of trust.

*Embodyed Practices*

The educators highlighted in the case studies spoke about learning practices such as theatre based role plays and power line-ups that use the body. I would underline that learning through the body can play a pivotal role in learning practices, particularly with women.
The body holds a lot of knowledge, or “body memory,” which can be valuable for learning and transforming experiences of violence against women (Ghaussy, 2001; Hall & Kondora, 1997; Horsman, 1999). Women in particular are often distanced from their bodies. Jenny Horsman (1999, p. 211-216) uses embodiment practices in her literacy and learning work with women. Most of the women she works with suffer some kind of abuse, to the extent that accepting themselves, or being in their bodies, does not feel safe. Often, they feel that their bodies belong to a perpetrator and carries associated feelings of shame. Self-recovery for these women is about regaining contact with and reclaiming their bodies.

Doerge (in Hales 2002, p. 3) also finds that, in feminist learning processes, elements of mind, body, heart and spirit are needed for deep change. She has observed, “The body is a powerful site for women’s conscientization, because our bodies are not only sites of domination, but sites of resistance as well” (1992, p. 33). For her, movement activities are central in furthering consciousness with women. In her practice, the use of “movement did much more to develop critical consciousness than all the hours sitting and talking in uncomfortable chairs” (Doerge 1992, p.35) could. Denise Nadeau (1996a) has also found that connecting with the body is the greatest contribution to education processes, because movement practices “involve the whole person – the physical, spiritual and emotional, as well as mental dimension” (p. 6).

I believe that these deep practices are a key to achieving vulnerability. I have found that the use of popular theatre work brings learners out of their heads and into their bodies. This enables them to think in new and different ways and helps them to approach difficult issues in a much more authentic way (see Boal, 1982, 1992, 1999).
**Spend Sufficient Time Unpacking and Addressing Oppressions**

I advocate taking the time to unpack and address the oppressions learners confront. I advocate this based on the expectation that learners likely have not previously been part of a process that enabled them to do this, and will not be able to move on if this has not been taken into account. Sam broached this idea when she said that it would be hard for women living with (dis)abilities to look at other oppressions if their own had not been dealt with thoroughly. She said (May 4, 2009):

> I don’t think it could have been until we got to that place where people felt that they’d been heard enough around their primary identity to be able to start thinking outside of their own experience, and looking at other... people’s experiences.

This phenomenon was also discovered by Lisa Barnoff and Ken Moffat (2007) in their study on anti-oppression practices in social work settings. Barnoff found that while:

> Feminists imagine that anti-oppression is a model of practice that deals with all structures of oppression [...] feminist members of marginalized communities perceive that their particular form of oppression is not attended to in the model (p. 56).

This suggests to me that work needs to be done to unpack all of the oppressions that learners have been hanging on to and have not had the opportunity to process. Until learners feel their own intersectional oppressions have been examined and addressed adequately, it seems unlikely that they will be open to moving on to considering the ways in which their social locations are interlocking and co-constituted.

In order to properly attend to the different oppressions that learners face, educators must ensure that they are providing space for everyone in the group. I have found that it is a common
problem in group work that the strongest voice is given precedence, regardless of what other issues exist. Alma illustrated (June 11, 2009) this in her example:

   There could be two or three women who are very vocal about their belonging to a group. For example, I remember one woman saying, “oh yes, I'm 65 and people don't respect me because of that, right?” So then people pay attention more to that... when in some groups, there could be women who are from the same elderly group, but they never say a word so it does not become a point of discussion. So it really depends on whether they are vocal or articulate. Some people are just quiet and then you find out what their comments are after the group... [They say] “Oh, can I speak with you?” or stuff like that.

   This type of phenomenon really requires educators to take an active role in raising issues that remain unspoken or unexplored in a group. This links directly to consciously attending to intersectionality and interlocking identities, as I discuss in the next section.

**Raise Awareness of Intersectionality and Interlocking Identities**

   Based on my reflections during this research, I suggest a series of pedagogies and practices be used as a progression that will enable educators to broach intersectionality and interlocking identities. As mentioned above, I do not think it is important for educators to be versed in the discourse of intersectionality and interlocking identities; rather, it is their insight into how power and identities play out that is significant.

   I believe that working with these conceptual frameworks requires a laddered approach, which ideally begins with learners grasping the praxis of intersectionality before being introduced to interlocking identities. As Sam suggested, it is effective when learners build understanding of one aspect of identity on top of another. She shared (May 4, 2009):
So how do you understand the experiences of racialized communities? And... women who are from racialized communities, and their ability to access services. Okay... so they can talk about that. And then I say, “what about women with (dis)abilities who are from racialized communities?”

A laddered approach to the concepts, starting with intersectionality as a basis from which to introduce notions of interlocking identities with learners, is a logical approach. This approach is valuable because the concept of intersectionality introduces the understanding of how an individual has multiple social locations that are embedded within systemic power. An interlocking identities framework builds on this understanding to show how individuals’ identities interact and come into existence through the Other. This phenomenon is described through Hill-Collins matrix of power (1990).

A laddered approach is also effective due to the taxing nature of challenging learners’ problematic behaviours. As discussed in Chapter Four, an overwhelming portion of the challenges that the educators reported involved raising and addressing the ways that many are complicit in perpetuating the oppressions of others (even as they see themselves as innocent). I believe that the laddered approach addresses this dynamic. If learners grasp and incorporate the concept of intersectionality into their ways of thinking, the framework of interlocking identities may be less challenging.

*Encourage Learning From “Failure”*

Even if an educator adopts all of these suggestions, unexpected or undesired events will still take place in the learning practice. This, however, is where the learning occurs. An
educator’s praxis must be reflective and model learning from things that did not go as well as they would have liked. As Tina commented (December 10, 2009):

There needs to be openness to not knowing. An ability to critically look at themselves, to learn from failures… The role of the facilitator is actually deepening the work with failure, because a lot of facilitators in this work try to make it an experience that people enjoy or get by, and will skirt around failures because the content is already difficult enough. I know that I sometimes get pulled in that direction because it’s hard to have the courage as the facilitator to keep people’s feet held to the fire, but that’s where the deepest learning happens.

I think this is valuable advice that epitomizes the findings of this research; an educators’ success depends on their ability to effectively challenging learners and transforming “failures” into learning opportunities.

**Exercises That Raise Awareness of the Intersecting and Co-constituted Nature of Identity and Oppression**

In this section, I share some exercises which feminist educators can either use or adapt to their own contexts. These activities raise awareness of the intersecting and co-constituted nature of social locations and of the ways that oppression connects with intersectionality and an interlocking identities framework. The first three activities draw on existing curriculum designed by feminist educators. The first two activities called the “Multiple Jeopardy Conga Line: Our Intersecting Identities” and “How Many of You... Exploring Our Own Oppressions” illustrate the compounding nature of intersecting oppressions. The second activity, which I have named “Holding my Sisters Hand,” moves through recognition of difference, as a necessary stage in achieving solidarity.
The final activity, “How we Learned to be a Boy/Girl,” enables learners to consider the concept of social constructed social constructionism, or the way in which one’s privileged social locations are co-constituted through interactions with Others. I believe understanding the co-constitutive nature of identity is the most critical, as well as the most complex, concept to grapple with in anti-oppression practice.

**Multiple Jeopardy Conga Line: Our Intersecting Identities**

This activity was designed by Andrea Canales of the “GO Girls” group in Victoria. A description of this activity also appears in the Girls Action Foundation resource entitled, *Amplify: Workshop Guide*, compiled by Pamela Teitlebaum (2009) (personal communication, Tatiana Fraser, October 24, 2010).32

**Objectives:**
- Name our many identities and examine how different combinations of oppression and privilege operate within us
- Explore ways in which an aspect of our identity can be a source of oppression in one situation and a source of privilege in another.

**Duration:** Approximately 25 minutes
*Add 1 minute for each additional person added to a group of ten

**Group Size:** 4+

**Skills:** Capacity to identify one's social locations, creative expression, interpersonal communication skills, increased perspective on difference

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32 I would like to thank Tatiana Fraser, Executive Director of the Girls Action Foundation for her permission to quote extensively from this resource. For Tatiana Fraser’s consent letter, see Appendix I: Permission to Cite Extensively from Copyrighted Materials.
Materials:
- Drums
- Percussion instruments
- Or music with a strong, repeating rhythm

Facilitation Tips:
- For groups that may not be as comfortable with the “conga line,” learners can do this exercise standing in a circle.
- Emphasizing the group’s collective responsibility to one another reinforces an atmosphere of trust and shared experience. It is important to set a tone of mutual trust and respect before this activity begins by:
  - Conducting an icebreaking activity
  - Giving learners the option to pass
- Understanding that this exercise can bring to mind difficult experiences for learners. It is important to leave enough time for conversation at the end and to prepare a list of resources or to have a resource person available.

Popular Education Prompts:
- Although this workshop provides a way of beginning with learners’ experiences of privilege and oppression, it is not an icebreaker.
- Ideally, this workshop should be followed by an activity where learners identify their individual and community assets, in order to avoid reinforcing a sense of powerlessness in the face of oppression.
- This activity could also be followed by a knowledge-building activity that could add to learners’ information about intersecting identities.

Leading the Activity: Steps to Take
- Ask the learners to form a large circle
- Invite learners to do some stretching before the exercise by squatting as low as they can comfortably go, then standing up and stretching, reaching as far up as they can.
- Ask them to reflect on their day so far.
- Begin to beat on your drum/instruments or turn on the music
- Ask people to start dancing around in a circle with a hand on the shoulder or back of the person in front of them. Get a good rhythm of the conga line going.
- Ask learners to dance their “height” for privilege/oppression when it comes to race, with the highest most privileged to the lowest for the least privileged, based on their experience. For example, those with a lot of racial privilege should stand tall and those without should squat down for a few beats. Explain that when we have privilege in certain areas it allows us to stand taller and reach heights more easily. Let people look around for a few beats.
- Repeat this for other categories of social location, such as nationality, immigration status, gender, etc.
- Ask learners to call out another identity category. This will allow learners to self identify for some of the categories, such as sexual orientation, if they wish. Please note that this may be risky for some learners. Remind learners that they only need to share that aspect if they are comfortable enough to publicly identify with a particular group.
- Ask learners to think of all the categories with which they identified today. Ask them to dance at their “average height,” which represents a combination of all their identity aspects.

**Adaptations:**
If there are group members with physical (dis)abilities or impairments this activity should be adjusted to have learners sitting and using their arms, which they lower to as close to the ground as they can comfortably go and raise as high over their heads as they can comfortably go.

**Debrief Questions:**
1. What did you notice about yourself in the exercise?
2. What did you notice about others in the group?
3. How did you determine your “average height?”

**Success Indicators**
- Learners come up with other aspects of social location for the group to dance to during the conga line
- Learners actively engage in the discussion during the debrief

**Reflection.**
This playful and energetic activity was designed for girls or young women; yet I think many learners would engage in this activity if time is taken for warming up and building trust. As well, with the suggested adaptations, this activity is accessible to the majority of potential learners while still having the same impact.

I believe this activity provides an effective way to facilitate learners in exploring intersectionality and particularly the compounding nature of intersections. This activity is valuable because it allows learners to experience their privileges and oppressions as they physically embody them during the dance. Because dancing lower to the ground is more difficult, the enactment of oppression in the dance is a realistic mirror of the barriers oppression creates in everyday life. Witnessing the levels at which others dance during the conga line based on their different intersecting social locations also gives onlookers visual cues with which to understand oppression and its compounding nature.
How Many of You… Exploring Our Own Oppressions

This activity was designed by Joanne Simpson (2009) and appeared in Everyone Belongs: A Toolkit for Applying Intersectionality, sponsored by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW) (personal communication, Judy White, November 3, 2010).

Objective:
- To generate discussion and self reflection about intersectionality

Materials:
- None

Duration:
- 5 minutes for doing the activity
- 15 minutes for debriefing
*Add 2 minutes to the debrief for each additional person added to a group of ten

Group Size: 5+

Popular Education Prompts:
- Although this workshop provides a way of beginning with learners’ experiences of privilege and oppression, it is not an icebreaker.

Leading the Activity: Steps to Take
- Explain to learners that they will be taking a moment to reflect on their own experiences of exclusion and discrimination. Tell the group that you will be naming different kinds of discrimination and asking learners to respond in various ways to these. Reinforce that it is impossible to name every single type of discrimination and that you apologize if something is left out. Assure the group that you will give them a chance afterward to let you know if you missed anything big. Also, it is important to mention to learners that they do not have to reveal everything about themselves and that it is their choice whether or not to respond to something. Learners do not have to participate in an action that would reveal an aspect of their identity or experience that they are not comfortable sharing with everyone.

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33 This exercise, and the ones that follow in this section, are quoted directly from their sources and have been reformatted in order to use a consistent format for all the example activities.
34 I would like to thank Judy White, Board Chair of CRIAW for her permission to quote extensively from this resource. For Judy White’s consent letter, see Appendix I: Permission to Cite Extensively from Copyrighted Materials.
• Start the activity by naming a type of discrimination and pairing it with an action. For example, you might say: “If you have ever experienced oppression or discrimination because of your gender, I want you to clap your hands. Don’t stop clapping until the activity is over.”

• Once people start clapping, name another kind of discrimination and pair it with a different action. You might say: “If you have ever experienced racism, I want you to stick out your tongue. If you are also clapping, don’t stop. Some of you may now be clapping and sticking out your tongue.”

• Name another kind of discrimination and pair it with a different action. You might say: “If you have ever experienced discrimination because of a (dis)ability, I want you to nod your head.”

• The activity can continue in this fashion. You may want to have learners shout or scream in the end, to let out some frustration. Keep in mind that you will be limited in terms of how many different combinations of actions people can do. Also, keep your audience in mind. If someone does not have control over their leg movements, they won’t be able to stomp their feet, for example.

• The goal of this activity is to get people thinking about the cumulative impact of multiple discriminations/oppressions.

**Adaptations:**
It is important to be aware of any physical (dis)abilities and choose the action you wish the group carry out accordingly. For example, you would want to avoid asking women to clap their hands as an action if a woman in the group had one hand, or to introduce stomping if any women in the group were similarly not able to move their legs and feet in a stomping action.

**Debrief Questions:**
- How did it feel when you had to do an action?
- How did it feel when an action called out did not apply to you?
- How did it feel to be doing multiple actions at the same time?
- How did it feel to be watching others who were doing more actions than you were?

**Success Indicators**
- Learners come up with other aspects of social location and action for the group to do
- Learners actively engage in the discussion during the debrief

**Reflection.**

This activity is described in the CRIAW handbook as an icebreaker. However, I would caution against doing an activity that raises and processes aspects of discrimination as an icebreaker, or near the very beginning of a learning process. Instead, introductions, warm up and
trust building activities should always come before any activity that will delve into political and personal issues.

In many ways, this activity is like the “Multiple Jeopardy Conga Line: Our Intersecting Identities.” Both activities provide ways to explore intersectionality and the compounding nature of discrimination or oppressions, and they allow learners to experience their complexity as they physically embody their social locations. However, I feel “How Many of You... Exploring Our Own Oppressions” may be more effective because each identity is associated with a distinct action, which makes it easier to see the effects of multiple oppressions more readily.

**Holding my Sister's Hand**

This activity was shared by Sue Carter from the Canadian Auto Workers Union (CAW) (personal communication, August 4, 2010), who spoke about developing this activity for co-ed training programs with the input of some of their peers. They conceptualized this activity as a way to make visual Peggy McIntosh’s (1995) Unpacking the Knapsack of White Privilege article. I named this activity *Holding my Sister’s Hand* after a bell hooks (1994) chapter by the same name in her book entitled *Teaching to Transgress*, who speaks of the same dynamics that are illustrated in this activity in terms of the fractured nature of women’s connection across difference as a nod to how these dynamics are illustrated through this activity.

**Objectives:**
- To understand the various ways that privilege plays out in everyday interactions
- To see the impacts that privilege and oppression has on the connections between group members

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35 I would like to thank Sue Carter for her permission to quote extensively from this resource. For Sue Carter’s consent letter, see Appendix I: Permission to Cite Extensively from Copyrighted Materials.
Duration: Approximately 40 minutes
*Add time for each additional person added to a group of ten

Group Size: 10+. If you don’t have a range of differently-located learners in the room (based on the aspects of difference you chose to highlight during the exercise), you need to modify this exercise and simply use the overhead for all of the questions. For example, it is not recommended to do this exercise in a circle if there are not a minimum of three people of colour in the group, in order to not produce further marginalization of individuals. In the case where there are less than three people of colour in the group the exercise should consist of the same introduction, followed by the statements being read, discussed and debriefed while participants remain in their seats.

Skills: capacity to identify one's social locations, creative expression, interpersonal communication skills, increased perspective on difference

Materials:
- Overheads, flipchart or handouts with additional questions

Facilitation Tips:
- This exercise depends on well-trained facilitators who have previously participated in the activity and practiced leading it prior to facilitating it in any learning process.
- Throughout this exercise, your tone should be serious but not heavy – this isn’t funny, but we’re not trying to be somber or make people feel bad or guilty, etc. These are just questions to get us thinking in ways we maybe haven’t before. These questions are not meant to blame people for oppression or to make them feel guilty – that’s tired and not useful. What is useful is engaging people in what they can do about oppression, encouraging them to actively intervene.
- Be cognizant of not asking any questions that will “out” learners about aspects of their identities that are not already known and/or that they may be comfortable sharing with the group.
- If learners are struggling with what to “do” with their privilege in one area or another, you may suggest the following:
  - Become aware of your privileges and their sources
  - Understand how these privileges work to the disadvantage of others
  - If you feel guilty, let go of this – replace it with a commitment to act for change.
  - Get involved – work with others; Know that nobody can work alone; oppression is bigger and older than any one of us
  - Be an ally.

Popular Education Prompts:
- Although this workshop provides a way of beginning with learners' experiences of privilege and oppression, it is not an icebreaker.
Leading the Activity: Steps to Take

- Introducing the idea of Privilege
  - If we want to tackle discrimination and inequality, we need to know how it affects us. Difference is used as the basis for discrimination. When difference leads to discrimination for one group, it usually leads to privilege for others. So, for example, when workers face concessions, shareholders generally gain. Likewise, when one group of workers is barred from the workplace, this benefits the other workers whose chances of being hired have just increased.
  
  - Say that privilege is kind of “in the air we breathe” for some of us. Being told we’re privileged can be pretty hard to take if we’re not privileged in many aspects of our identity, for example, if we’re just trying to put food on the table, etc. We don’t need to feel guilty about things we haven’t thought about – that’s not the point of this exercise.
  
  - It’s also not meant to paralyze us - in fact, it’s meant to do the opposite. It’s important to see the world in a different way - to begin the process of standing where other people stand.
  
  - Remember, unearned privilege is a consequence of the discrimination within our society. These divisions create the “haves” and “have nots.” Unearned privileges are bestowed on some and withheld from others. People knowingly and unknowingly “cash in” on their privileges.
  
  - Most people with unearned privileges would not be where they are, do what they do, and have the skills, access, resources and power they have if it were not for colour, gender, sexual orientation, physical abilities, etc.
  
  - Privilege also means that certain things are the norm: for example, being male, being White, being heterosexual, being able-bodied, etc. Society is modelled on these norms or powerful messages. This can result in keeping members of oppressed groups and their struggles invisible. Resources, power and privilege will continue to come to the privileged until we make the necessary changes to those systemic structures that allow this to happen.
  
  - Privilege is a difficult concept for most of us to come to terms with. Privilege refers to unearned advantage.
  
  - As the educator, give an example of a privilege that you have, based on your group status, relative to someone else (i.e. I have the right to walk down the streets holding hands with my partner without worrying we might get assaulted; I can go to the bank and see over the counter; etc.). Note your surprise when you discovered that the world didn’t work as well for others. Say that privilege:
    
    o Can be hard to recognize; it’s just what we’re used to, something we take for granted
    o Can be hard to acknowledge, because we didn’t ask for it
    o Can make us feel guilty
    o Might be hard to let go of, especially if we cling to the idea that we’re entitled to it
  
  - Recognizing privilege is a good place to begin as we try to figure out how to work together and how to work across difference.

5. Introduce the activity. Say we’re going to look at a series of questions that point out where some of us might have privileges that others don’t. These questions will
probably make many of us feel uncomfortable – this is an important learning exercise.

6. Ask learners to form a circle. Say that this exercise will work most effectively if we begin by joining hands. As mentioned, if you don’t have a range of differently-located learners in the room (based on the aspects of difference you chose to highlight during the exercise), you may need to modify this exercise and simply use the overhead for all of the questions.

7. Say that you’re going to read out a series of statements. If the statement is true for learners, take a step forward; if the statement is false for learners, you take a step back.

8. Read aloud the following statements, asking learners to step forward or back as indicated.
   - Whether I use cheques, credit cards or cash, I am certain my skin colour or race won’t be a measure of my financial reliability.
   - I can be pretty sure that if I ask to speak to the manager or the “person in charge,” I will be facing a person of my race.
   - If a police officer stops me, I can be quite sure that I haven’t been singled out because of my race.
   - I can comfortably say that at my workplace, I don’t encounter or will likely not encounter racial slurs or racist remarks directed at members of my race.
   - I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or have my actions overly scrutinized because of my race.
   - I am fairly certain that members of my race have a lower unemployment rate than members of most other racial groups.
   - I can be sure that my children will be given school materials that name and celebrate the existence and achievements of my race.
   - If my day, week or year is going badly, I don’t have to wonder if each negative episode or situation has racial overtones.

Depending on the diversity in the room, some learners will be forced to drop hands as the statements are read. This should be uncomfortable.

Going Deeper:
If you wish to go further, you can also read and discuss the remaining questions from Unpacking the Knapsack of White Privilege or substitute any of these questions for the ones mentioned previously. These questions are:

- I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
- I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
- If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
- I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.

When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.

I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race.

I can be casual about whether or not to listen to another person's voice in a group in which s/he is the only member of his/her race.

I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.

Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.

I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.

I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.

I can be pretty sure that my children's teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern others' attitudes toward their race.

I can talk with my mouth full and not have people put this down to my color.

I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty or the illiteracy of my race.

I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.

I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.

I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.

I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance or feared.

I can be pretty sure that an argument with a colleague of another race is more likely to jeopardize her/his chances for advancement than to jeopardize mine.

I can be pretty sure that if I argue for the promotion of a person of another race, or a program centering on race, this is not likely to cost me heavily within my present setting, even if my colleagues disagree with me.

If I declare there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn't a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have.

I can choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist programs, or disparage them, or learn from them, but in any case, I can find ways to be more or less protected from negative consequences of any of these choices.
• My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races.
• I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing or body odor will be taken as a reflection on my race.
• I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.
• I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.
• I can be pretty sure of finding people who would be willing to talk with me and advise me about my next steps, professionally.
• I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative or professional, without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.
• I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.
• I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
• I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.
• I can arrange my activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race.
• If I have low credibility as a leader I can be sure that my race is not the problem.
• I can easily find academic courses and institutions which give attention only to people of my race.
• I can expect figurative language and imagery in all of the arts to testify to experiences of my race.
• I can chose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.
• I can travel alone or with my spouse without expecting embarrassment or hostility in those who deal with us.
• I have no difficulty finding neighborhoods where people approve of our household.
• My children are given texts and classes which implicitly support our kind of family unit and do not turn them against my choice of domestic partnership.
• I will feel welcomed and "normal" in the usual walks of public life, institutional and social (McIntosh, 1995).

**Variations:**
The questions used in this exercise primarily on race and racism. In order to highlight other identities and isms I have added example of other questions that could be used as a follow-up, in a subsequent circle. (These additional questions are not ones used or endorsed by Sue Carter or the Canadian Auto Workers Union):

• If I attend a public meeting or event, I can be fairly certain that I will physically be able to enter the building
• If I attend a public meeting or event I can be fairly certain I will be able to hear what is being said
• If I attend a public meeting or event, I can be fairly certain that I will be able to read any written material that is provided
• If I attend a public meeting or event, I can be fairly certain that it will be conducted in a language I can speak
• If I am part of a group, I can be fairly certain that I will not be called on to share in expenses I cannot afford (for example, for food or for money to get to a meeting spot)
• If members of a group I am part of are referred to as “citizens,” I will not feel excluded. In fact, I may not even notice that this word is used instead of people, individuals, etc.
• I can be fairly certain the history and political struggles of my people will be understood in any public meetings or events I attend
• I can be fairly certain that any group I am part of will not schedule meetings I am unable to attend or serve food that I cannot eat as a result of my religious observances

Debrief Questions:
• How did you feel during this exercise? What does this exercise feels like from the perspective of someone who identifies as a person of colour? From the perspective someone who identifies as White?
• Was there an instance when two people of colour were beside each other and stay connected (as they move back)? How did this feel?
• What about if there was one people of colour by themselves? How did this feel?
• What do you think we might learn from this?

Take a few responses and say that we’re going to look at some more areas where some enjoy privileges that others don’t, and then we’ll do an overall debrief.

Adaptations:
This activity could also be conducted with the participants seated if women in the group have (dis)ability or mobility issues that would prevent them from standing, or make it difficult to remain standing for any length of time. Also, as mentioned, you may choose to modify this exercise and simply use the overhead for all of the questions and ask participants to indicate when they would be moving closer or further away based on their responses.

Success Indicators
• Learners step forward and back as indicated by the questions
• Learners actively engage in the concept using the debrief
Reflection.

This is an interesting and effective exercise because it viscerally depicts the effect of discrimination and privilege on the learners participating. As designed, this activity focuses primarily on race. In order to unearth the intersecting identities of the group, it is important to present a range of questions that touch on multiple aspects of identity.

In reflecting on this activity, I feel it is very effective in illustrating the connection between privilege and oppression and how one does not come without the other. In this aspect, I agree wholeheartedly with the educators who shared this process with me. As Em commented (April 24, 2008):

People get to see discrimination, because both parties are taking a step, so it’s not that discrimination [just] leads to a step backwards, it’s that discrimination leads to a step backwards and a step forwards for White people. […] Ultimately what happens is that people are forced, in a mixed group, to drop hands. And that is an experience that you don’t have on paper. That’s the invisible piece of privilege, is that you don’t know that you’ve moved forward, because you haven’t physically let go of anyone. And that’s been really powerful.

In this way, “Holding my Sisters Hand “begins to illustrate the interlocking nature of social locations.

How we Learned to be a Boy/Girl

My research revealed that most learning processes focus on individual experience and the political social, cultural, power inscribed in these experiences through macro-level institutions and policies. This ignores the role of interacting with others in identity construction and the responsibility that individuals must take for these interactions on a daily basis. Social
constructionism is a complex and contentious concept, and there is a lack of activities that teach this idea. I adapted this activity from one called *Learning Social Roles: Boy/Girl Piece*, which the School of the Americas (SOA) Watch: Close the School of the Americas (1998) organization posted on their website resources (personal communication, SOA Watch Staff, November 9, 2010). Its goal is to get at the socially constructed nature of gender roles as a way to address the challenge of raising learners understanding about the co-constituted nature of social locations.

I saw the need for this type of learning process because so much of the analysis that is promoted through activities educators use to promote an understanding of oppression and difference focuses on large players and to a far lesser degree on historical dynamics, ignoring the ways that dominant interests are internalized and enacted every day.

**Objectives:**
1. Self-reflection about personal identity
2. Setting the groundwork for maintaining a focus on talking about issues from one's own experience instead of perceptions of the experiences of Others.

**Duration:**
- Up to 5 minutes for each person in the group to share
- Approximately 25 minutes to debrief for a group of ten
*add 5 minutes for each additional group member over ten

**Group Size:** 4+

**Skills:** Capacity to reflect on one's social locations, creative expression, interpersonal communication skills, increased perspective on difference

**Materials:**
- Paper and pens

**Leading the Activity: Steps to Take**
- Ask learners to write a short (1 - 2 pages) reflective piece on their childhood memories and experiences that helped shape their gender identities. Ask them to address what

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36 I would like to thank Fr. Roy Bourgeois, SOA Watch Founder for his permission to quote extensively from this resource. For Fr. Roy Bourgeois’ consent letter, see Appendix I: Permission to Cite Extensively from Copyrighted Materials.
messages they received as children about what it meant to be a boy or a girl. Also, ask them to discuss who sent those messages (parents, teachers, coaches, other kids, etc.). Be clear that this is not to be an academic piece, but a reflective effort regarding their own experiences.

- In order to ensure that everybody has an opportunity to share her or his story, break into diverse small groups of 8-10 if necessary. Give learners the option to either read their pieces or to share their pieces and reflections from memory. Ask for volunteers to share their stories.

**Debrief Questions** (after everyone has shared):

- How did (or have) your schooling, parents, or friends played a role in your understanding of what it meant (means) to be a boy or a girl?
- Have you ever been ridiculed for doing or saying something that others didn't consider masculine or feminine? How did that make you feel? How did you react?
- What messages do you send to others regarding what it means to be a boy or a girl? Have you ever ridiculed someone else for doing something you didn't consider masculine or feminine?
- How has what you learned about being a boy dictated what it meant to be a girl, or how has what you learned about being a girl dictated what it meant to be a girl? How do you think the socialization of one gender is affected by the socialization of the other gender?37
- Have you ever systematically considered how you developed your gender identity? Why or why not?

**Facilitation Tips:**

- You may want to assign the story writing ahead of time, to give learners a chance to finish it.
- When assigning the story writing, be sure to mention that stories will be shared in the group if participants are comfortable.
- Because some individuals will include very personal information, they may be hesitant to read their work, even in the small groups. It is sometimes effective in such situations for facilitators to share their pieces first. Consider sharing your piece when you give this assignment. If you make yourself vulnerable, others will be more comfortable doing the same.
- Be aware that exploring gender in this binary fashion does not account for the range of identities within gender and may be particularly exclusionary to those who identify as queer, dykes, transsexual or asexual. If it is not mentioned by a learner, make sure you speak about the ways that gender socialization is exclusionary during the debrief.
- Be sure to allow the opportunity to pass; do not put anyone on the spot to share with the group.
- Be sure to allow time for everyone to be able to speak, whether reading their poems or sharing them from memory.

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37 This question was added to the original text of this activity in order to draw out learning about how identities co-constitute each other.
Popular Education Prompts:

- Although this workshop provides a way of beginning with learners’ experiences of privilege and oppression, it is not an icebreaker.
- Ideally, this workshop should be followed by an activity where learners identify their individual and community assets, in order to avoid reinforcing a sense of powerlessness in the face of oppression.
- This activity could also be followed by a knowledge-building activity that could add to learners’ information about interlocking identities.

Success Indicators

- Learners display self reflection in their personal stories
- Learners actively engage in the discussion during the debrief

Reflection.

I was drawn to this activity because the use of personal stories is effective in illustrating many concepts. I added the debrief questions: How has what you learned about being a boy dictated what it meant to be a girl, or how has what you learned about being a girl dictated what it meant to be a girl? And how do you think the socialization of one gender is affected by the socialization of the other gender? These queries will draw out learnings about the interlocking nature of identities.

As SOA Watch noted, this activity is “adaptable for race, socioeconomic class, religion and other identifiers” (1998). However, I felt that gender was a good way to illustrate the concept of interlocking identities because it is a topic that would be familiar to learners. A walk through any toy store is all the evidence that is needed to argue that boys and girls are socialized in distinctly different ways! I hoped that starting with a gender analysis would solicit minimal resistance and could act as a starting point for bridging learners’ awareness into other aspects of identity that are more contentious, such as ability, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, class or race, among other socially constructed aspects of identity.
Navigating Tensions

As mentioned in Chapter One, Thiagi Inc.’s (1999) research revealed that effective facilitation is about educators’ ability to adapt their approach based on their desired learning goals, the activity they are facilitating, and the energy of the group, among other factors. For example, educators need to strike a balance between unilaterally making decisions on behalf of the group and sharing power in decision making. I view the educator’s role in balancing such aspects as a continuum of tensions to navigate. In this section, I offer suggestions for thinking through some of the key tensions involved in consciousness-raising learning practices. These tensions include creating unity and recognizing differences between women, between feelings of comfort and discomfort in group learning processes and those associated with drawing on learners’ lived experiences within consciousness-raising processes.

Tension Between Unity and Division

Among the feminist educators with whom I spoke, there was a tension between using pedagogies and practices that are unifying (for example holistic or spiritual) and others that seem to be divisive (such as challenging one another). The practice of challenging oppressive behaviours can be seen to divide women into camps based on their social locations. As discussed, educators may shy away from the use of challenges because they do not want to divide the group or provoke a backlash. Conversely, solely seeking commonalities in order to unite women may not produce the desired shifts in consciousness or social change. The tensions produced by this seeming dichotomy can surface in many ways and cause dilemmas for educators. For example, an educator might be faced with the dilemma of whether or when to
have the group caucus in like identity groups as opposed to working across differences in the large group.

On one hand, those who advocate unifying practices make a strong argument that such practices support the building of social movements. Alma felt that social transformation can happen through unity, and that this change begins with seeing how women are divided and understanding the reasons why this occurs. She stated (August 10, 2009):

Who started these hierarchies [of identities] anyway? How did it come about? […] Understanding the origins of differences, it starts to make sense why marginalized communities always have in-fights; [its] around dividing and conquering. We are basically doing what other groups want us to do. So why are we doing it? And why are we so good at it? Why are we so good at putting each other down, and why don’t we cross the room and tell the person who is really responsible for this what they need to hear from us. I believe it is an important piece [for social change]. That is why we need to talk about it. Because I think when you do that our vision starts to become clearer. That we are here for probably the same things and we didn’t even know it. The whole fact that our differences are drummed up is not because we want it, but because there is something that is benefitting from that.

I find this interesting because of the way in which unifying practices often appear to advocate *transcending* rather than *engaging* social change, which seems suspiciously like liberalism, as opposed to Alma’s approach which takes a more radical stance.

Conversely, as we learned through the Facilitator Train-the-Trainer case study, challenging can be very productive. I also agreed with Bezawit’s stance, when she said (November 12, 2009):
I see conflict as what produces consciousness. I see it as the learning piece. When conflict happens in groups, *that’s* when things come out. That’s when we start *hearing* things, that’s when we start *seeing* things. [That’s where] those of us who are facilitating can start picking [things] up. […] You start seeing how power plays out in that conflict. You start seeing where things can actually end up, and then how you can, as facilitators, help to shape [things] within that conflict process.

Here, Bezawit makes a strong argument for encouraging learners to work through the problematic behaviours that will inevitably surface in a group.

However, I think the tension between unifying practices and those that acknowledge differences need not be about choosing one approach over the other. As with many of aspects of facilitating consciousness-raising processes, educators must draw on the strengths of each in order to embrace the differently-situated knowledges that differently-located women bring to a learning process.

For example, Tina’s practice illustrated a balance between unity and division. In her process, Tina used practices that brought the group together, such as beginning a session with spiritual grounding exercises and a “power circle” discussion, in order to create the basis of trust and connection needed to work through issues of identity and difference later in the session. Based on my own facilitating experience, I think it makes sense to put a greater focus on unification to bring the group together and foster a sense of trust. Later in the process, I would rely less on unity in favour of exploring the issues of difference and increasing the level of challenges. Of course, any oppressive comments made at any stage in the process would still need to be addressed. I feel this method would enable challenges to be done in a respectful way and for there to be more receptivity to challenge later in the process.
Within such practices, it is imperative to express care *through* challenging. Far too often women within the helping professions can fall into a practice of coddling learners in a way that does not name or solve problems. I would argue for an approach that strikes a balance between unity and division, and that advocates erring on the side of challenging more would not be harmful if done mindfully. Feeling good may not be what is required in the learning space. Jane Elliot (2006), who leads the blue eyes/brown eyes anti-racism process, is one example of a successful, although controversial, educator who exhibits her caring through challenging learners to consider their biases and the impact of their behaviours. In her trademark frank style, she has been known to welcome learners to learning processes by saying “I'm your resident *bitch* for the day” (Mirza, 2005).

*Leadership in Challenging*

One factor educators should consider when challenging is the balance between themselves and the learners in terms of taking the lead in naming and addressing problematic behaviours. Rather than assuming that learners are not open to being challenged, educators need to give learners credit and engage them in the conflict inherent to challenging instead of fearing what might happen if they do. Learners may take the lead on addressing problematic behaviours if given the opportunity. For this reason, it is important to have tools for analysis that enable learners to feel confident in naming oppression when it occurs and mechanisms such as group expectations and guidelines that assist in making the process accessible to everyone.

Roberta offered some important insight about when and how an educator should step in and manage conflict that surfaces from challenging. She reflected that, in a short term learning
process, it is important for the educator to be more active in managing conflict. She said (June 12, 2009):

> If it’s a shorter term thing, it’s a one-off; you need to do that in a very, very strategic way, because people are... looking at you. You really have to be careful, because your input in the group makes a big difference within the group.

I think this comment points to the inordinate amount of weight an educator’s input may have on group opinion. I also think she was referring to the ways in which learners take time to develop trust in one another and in the educators. Learners require time to test and observe how others respond to different circumstances. In a group that meets over a relatively short period of time, there is less time to build this trust. As a result, the educator may not be able to challenge dynamics that create conflict as directly because the group has not had time to establish the same level of trust.

In contrast, a longer term learning process allows for learners to work together as a group and engage with one another’s challenges. It is particularly helpful if they have been equipped with tools, such as the theoretical perspectives that enable learners to decode problematic behaviours described in Brenda and Bezawit’s case study.

**Comfort and Discomfort**

From the educators’ comments, and based on my experience, learners tend to resist being challenged. Challenging invites learners to explore areas or themes that cause discomfort and can therefore cause learners to become vulnerable in the learning process. As several educators commented, it is the educator’s responsibility to lead learners into these areas through modelling
and providing moments to come in and out of the difficult discussions without excusing learners from doing this work.

Working with our shadow selves (Jung, 1938) can be disquieting but ultimately rewarding. Carl Jung referred to the shadow as part of our unconscious mind made up of repressed memories and weaknesses. He said, “Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. If an inferiority is conscious, one always has a chance to correct it” (Jung, 1938, p. 131). I believe that the discomfort that comes from confronting the unfamiliar parts of ourselves is an element that must be acknowledged and treated as central to all aspects of a learning process. In the following section, I consider how elements such as unity, challenging and discomfort must fit within the goals of a learning process.

**Timing and Progression of Learning**

In any group learning context, an educator needs to consider how quickly to work towards achieving group goals and how long can be spent on aspects such as group trust building and developing an anti-oppression analysis, which are often not the main goals learners came to achieve.

If facilitating a political action group process, the educator must consider how urgently the group needs to experience a success. If the group is quite disenfranchised or has been losing ground in their political struggles recently, there will be a need to move forward more quickly. In this case, focusing more on the short term learning goals will sustain learners, particularly if those goals tie directly into their advocacy or campaigning efforts. Processing oppression rarely
seems like a win in the short term. Conversely, if educators feel that group members can sustain themselves for a longer period before experiencing a success, they can spend a bit more time focusing on meeting longer term goals, such as raising consciousness.

**Drawing on Personal Experience**

The educators with whom I spoke had varying views about learners sharing their experiences and drawing on these to ground their analysis. Although nearly everyone felt this was a productive practice, several shied away from it. Their hesitancy was rooted in the fear that learners would be overly vulnerable, either through outing themselves or further “Othering” themselves based on their marginalized identities. Educators also did not want to put learners in a position where they would be seen as less “powerful” by their peers, especially in highly politicized work environments.

I see their concern, however, I feel that grounding feminist learning pedagogies in women’s experience is central, and that there are several cautions to be aware of in order to ensure that this is being done in a good way. For example, feminists of colour have cautioned against the use of storytelling as a means to share and explore experiences rooted in subjugated histories. They advise against naively trying to “learn from others’ experience” in ways that may reinforce the binary of oppressor/oppressed (Ahmed, 2000). Chan Lean Heng (1996) has reflected on how feminist learning processes often put women of colour on the spot to “speak from their identity,” with the intention that this is enabling the representation of suppressed knowledges. However, calling on marginalized learners to share their experiences, and their social locations, is often the same as calling upon individuals to “perform their race” (Razack,
1998, p. 52), and to “constantly [be] constructed as the ‘Other’” (Bannerji, 1991, p. 68). This practice, in essence, enacts interlocking identity construction in a problematic way.

Instead, an educator must introduce and frame storytelling or experience sharing in an anti-oppressive way, drawing on learnings from intersectionality and interlocking identities frameworks. Following this, it is important to then let learners set their own parameters of what they share, only intervening directly if a challenge is clearly required or if the group has come together for therapeutic reasons. In the latter case, Roberta noted that educators have an increased responsibility in psychoeducational settings or groups where personal healing is the primary objective; they must ensure that learners are not over sharing and flooding\textsuperscript{38} others with their disclosures.

**Conclusion**

I have proposed these pedagogies and practices as guidelines for feminist educators, who may adapt them for their own purposes to successfully raise women’s consciousness around issues of identity and power. The tension between the need to challenge and the difficulties associated with challenging was mentioned frequently throughout this research. For this reason, I find the discussion of the educators’ tools for navigating the challenging process to be the most valuable part of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{38}Flooding is when something triggers someone and suppressed emotions or memories rush back in a way that hinders healing. Horowitz (1986) explains, “The emotional flooding of trauma survivors involves excessive leakage of minimally processed affective experience. Because trauma related feelings are intense they tend to leak out in ways that trauma survivors experience as unintended, unpredictable and incomprehensible trauma survivors might… When survivors are flooded they experience their feelings as intrusive and out of control (in Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 1999, p. 241).
Tensions always need to be considered, as the art of facilitation is navigating the tensions that arise in consciousness-raising processes. As with the challenges outlined in Chapter Four, I found that the tensions I reflected on in this chapter raised complicated issues around identity, power and the facilitation of learning processes, which enacted the very dynamics of intersectionality and interlocking identities that I engaged with throughout this dissertation.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Introduction

In this chapter, I reflect on the outcomes for learners participating in learning processes and educators who participated in the research process. Following this, I review the key findings of this dissertation and make suggestions for future research in this field.

Outcomes for Learners Participating in Learning Processes

The educators had different reflections about the outcomes of their consciousness-raising processes for learners. Roberta felt the learning process brought about positive changes. She shared (June 12, 2009):

It’s some hard work, man. Let me tell you! When you see people come in and doing that change, whoa! I get a high! It’s my job. [laughs] I get high on the passion of how we can do anti-oppression work, and it can work. And people can actually do that work... I’ve seen change, transformation.

Similarly, Nina observed that “women have gone immediately down onto the floor [of the drop-in centre] and started applying what we’ve talked about in the group” (November 12, 2009). The educators reported many examples of how such positive changes occur. For example, many educators noted that change happens as women affect their immediate surroundings. For example, Roberta witnessed women support one another in the group through sharing ways to navigate oppressive circumstances and to speak out and revolutionize as part of their daily lives (November 22, 2008). Bezawit said she saw learners’ attitudes shift in relation to others in the
group. She reported that a learner “actually said ‘now I realize how I have internalized all these stereotypes about immigrants and people of colour and I realize how problematic it is’… so she took some responsibility” (November 22, 2008).

Bezawit also noted that women applied their new awareness when they began to challenge dynamics in personal relationships. She observed (November 12, 2009) that women made changes:

Even in their own personal relationships, in terms of how they challenge dynamics around themselves. Because while in the group, they’ll come back and say, […] “Oh, I had this discussion because, you know, we were watching TV and my partner said so and so and I challenged him right away. Like, you need to think about this, this, this.” […] Around gender, relationship or around race, they actually apply it, even with family members at dinners and holidays. Things where shit gets said and they go, “like, well, you know, what you just said is really homophobic,” right.

The educators also spoke about the multiplying effect of the trainings, and the impact that these had on the wide community. Brenda noted that using an anti-oppression framework to train a group of educators who would go on to teach other women was social action in and of itself (April 18, 2008). Bezawit expanded (November 12, 2009) on this comment, explaining the impact these trainings had:

A lot of the women that we worked with have gone on to run groups [or] start different community projects. […] So in terms of broader social change, I think it has impacted in terms of the communities that they work with. […] It allows them to use those skills and those tools that they learned. […] It’s helped to work with other women, to have them make change in their lives, [and] other women’s lives.
Ideally this kind of learning process has very tangible and visible outcomes. However, I do not think that such concrete and substantial outcomes should overshadow other everyday actions. As Mika noted (April 20, 2009), many self proclaimed anti-oppressive feminists are not:

Valuing actions at home, [or] valuing actions that are stereotypically seen as small, but have huge implications [for] how we acknowledge feminist activism.
What does that mean today? Does it mean being at a rally? Does it mean standing up at home, [or] to whatever patriarchal system that’s in your family?

Wanting tangible outcomes can unintentionally prescribe skills and attitudes which are deemed valuable only by a few. Educators need to consider the ways in which they value learning outcomes and their participants' actions in order to ensure their learning processes are not inadvertently espousing patriarchal values.

Pointing to other indicators of learning outcomes, the educators remarked that many learners became more politically engaged upon completing learning processes. Nina noted that these women applied their learning to their political action. She shared (November 12, 2009):

I do think that people do take it up. It’s not like it just goes in and stays there. I think people do take it wherever they go and share what they’ve learned or what they’re realizing or what they’re putting together. [For example], they might ask a politician a question.

Bezawit also said, “I might run into people in protests. Years ago they would never be there, and now they’re on the street” (May 9, 2008). Educators who are seeking evidence of learning outcomes should not overlook these efforts as political actions.

Brenda reflected that women’s consciousness-raising processes also impacted the broader community by training activists to navigate difference. She noted that movements for social
change require an intersectional, interlocking identities and anti-oppression analysis. Brenda observed that certain activists are losing ground or not making progress due to racism in the movement. She noted, for instance, that White-skinned Jews need to work through racism towards Pro-Palestinian Solidarity “activists who are Palestinian or from Arab communities” (August 10, 2009). She went on to comment (August 10, 2009):

But over and over again, when those of us who do that work challenge that reality, we’re told that’s not part of the work, it’s not necessary […] we don’t have time for these other things. I would say that from my experience and in talking to other women who do similar work from a similar location, that seems to be a key difficulty in moving social movements forward, that this particular work is not being done. I don’t see how we can do social change without doing this work.

I completely agree that this avoidance of challenging is a key difficulty and the crux of many impasses in social justice organizing, which the approaches outlined here can address.

Finally, other educators were more sceptical about what changes these learning processes brought about. Alma wondered if learners’ positive evaluations of the processes were just automatic responses. She reflected on the immediate outcomes that learners reported (May 7, 2008):

When I invite comments at the end [of a session], does it become this automatic response that it was a great day because we weren’t at work and we were here doing something different, and therefore it’s nice? We had a free lunch and all that? Like, all those things come to my mind. […] I think it’s great because I think there are some authentic responses, but at the same time I need to also think about, like how real is that greatness, like in terms of what they do.
Alma also mentioned that it is hard to know what the longer term outcomes are in many cases. In her role as a facilitator of organizational change processes she shared, “I never get to find out; I am an independent person who comes in, you know, to do education work for one day or two days, and then I don’t really know what happens” (May 7, 2008).

I think that Alma’s concern is realistic, particularly if an educator does not have an ongoing connection with the learners that would facilitate the observation of more organic changes that evaluations cannot always capture. Many educators do not have the opportunity to observe the impact of these processes on learners’ daily lives. Yet the choices that educators make in terms of how they design and facilitate learning sessions are based on what they are hoping learners will take away. This opens a possibility for future research, which I will elaborate on at the end of this chapter.

**Outcomes for Educators Participating in the Research Process**

The primary aim of this project was to provide reflections that could improve the approaches, design and facilitation employed in future consciousness-raising processes. Yet the research also immediately benefited the feminist educators because they were given a venue to articulate and exchange their ideas. Several educators commented on the usefulness of the research, as well as on the personal process of participating in this research process.

Sam appreciated the research process and she spoke particularly about the focus group. She said that it felt more connected than other processes she has attended where the focus was on the need to “impart something potentially useful.” In contrast, this focus group was more welcoming and conversational because of “the way that it got set up and who is in the room” (Sam, August 10, 2009).
Other educators felt that the interview questions helped them to hone their own practices. For example, Alma commented, “this [interview] really helps me think a little more clearly about why I do the things I do” (May 4, 2010). Viv complimented me on my approach, saying (April 24, 2008):

You’ve given me lots to think about. The questions have been really helpful to just reflect on; I think that’s always one of the useful things about these sorts of processes anyway. Because I just get so much into the grind of doing the work that I don’t do enough reflecting on it.

This was gratifying feedback because I aimed to add to the educators’ praxis throughout the process of the research, not just at the conclusion when the findings were shared.

Limitations of This Research

Although this dissertation has many strengths, it also has several limitations. In terms of the research focus, if I had been clear about my interest in intersectionality and interlocking identities earlier in the research process, I could have noted my desire to look at these frameworks during recruitment. As a result, I would have had more specific data on intersectionality and interlocking identities.

My methods for selecting research participants also resulted in certain limitations. As explained in Chapter Three, I recruited educators by soliciting referrals and opinions from feminists and/or adult educators who work in non-credit contexts with whom I was connected, as well as others whom the initial referees recommended. When I set out to recruit educators, I stated that the research would be housed in a university, and I asked that participants identify in
some way with the term “feminism.” These conditions may have influenced the makeup of my
final group of educators.

To begin with, the academic orientation may also have alienated some educators who
were recommended. I am aware of one educator who had a college education and many years of
experience leading groups of marginalized women, but who did not feel that she knew enough to
take part in this research. For this reason, I suspect that some educators may have felt that
participation in my research required an awareness of, or identification with, an academic
feminist discourse.

In addition, potential research participants may not have been recommended or chosen to
take part based on the recruitment including the word “feminism.” The majority of the educators
who participated identified as feminists, but most had qualifications. They identified as Black
feminists, Indigenous feminists and Womanists, to name a few. Yet other feminist educators who
do not see themselves as feminists would not have participated. For example, as previously
mentioned, a First Nations educator who was recommended contacted me specifically to explain
how no First Nations women would identify as feminist because this is a colonial construct and
that First Nations culture is matrilineal, making the idea of feminism redundant. I suspect if this
research had been hosted by a community agency as opposed to a university, or had used the
language of women’s rights or women’s empowerment instead of “feminism,” participation
would have been accessible to more women. Still, I felt it was important to honour the word
“feminist” and all it has, and could, stand for.

Similarly, I found myself struggling to involve feminist educators representing different
social locations during my selection process. In this regard, I would have had better access to
participants if I had been savvier or more thorough during the recruitment stage.
Another limitation is related to the scope of the research. If I had included a larger sample of feminist educators, I would have had more nuanced data. Also, my choice to focus on two case studies limited the depth of my analysis. If I had only focused on one case, there could have been more depth to the data.

My own biases and limitations as a researcher also had an impact on all stages. This research was limited by my skills as an interviewer. Initially, I was not asking enough questions and my questions were not pointed enough. The quality of the data improved as my skills improved in this area. The data was also affected by my tendency to mirror some of the educators’ in their hierarchization of race and to feel for the problems of the person who has more marginalized aspects of identity, while largely ignoring the person who has more privileged aspects of identity. Both of these stances limited the ways I analysed and presented the data. This limitation revealed my wish not to displease the educators who participated, which also affected this dissertation.

My biases and locations also played a role in this research. As a woman, a feminist educator, and having post-secondary education as many of the educators did, I felt that I was a member of the community being investigated. My insider status had several implications for this work. It allowed me to interact with research participants and their stories with greater perceived familiarity and ease than someone who was not associated with this work or these communities. As an insider, I could understand the specificities of the contexts educators worked in and I knew useful tangents to follow when asking questions in order to hone in on the relevant or interesting details. However, my insider status made me less attuned to the differences between myself and the educators and led me to make assumptions about the information that they shared with me. Based on my insider status, I sometimes offered insights that led respondents’ answers. For
example my input may have prompted educators to agree with me, rather than explore their own ideas.

As a White, straight, younger, and generally less experienced educator I was also an outsider to the communities represented by the feminist educators in many ways. Because of this, I may have misinterpreted the meaning behind respondents’ ideas or missed important lines of questioning. I have addressed these potential limitations to the best of my ability through the use of multiple methods of collecting data in order to triangulate, and by getting participant feedback on transcripts and my initial analysis in order to ensure that the data was as trustworthy as possible.

Finally, this exploration was limited by the educators’ desire to be seen in a positive light. This created a situation where participants self-censored in order to portray what they thought were socially acceptable responses. I tried to account for this limitation by presenting opportunities for the educators to discuss what they would change about their practice and using appreciative language, as opposed to asking about “failures.” I attempted to acknowledge tentative answers and to present the interviews and focus groups as spaces in which the educators could take risks. I also encouraged participants to take advantage of the anonymity the research provided and to explore ideas or practices they might not feel comfortable sharing with colleagues. Despite my best efforts, these biases will have influenced the research.

Key Findings

The following section highlights the major findings, which include the relationship between educators’ social locations and feminist standpoint, the limitations of intersectionality...
and interlocking identities frameworks and ideas for how learnings that resonate with
intersectionality and interlocking identities frameworks add to feminist educators’ praxis.
Finally, I discuss how educators can use this research to develop their praxes.

**Educators’ Identities and Feminist Standpoint**

Feminist academic discourse has suggested that women of colour and marginalized women can achieve a feminist standpoint just by virtue of having these social locations. As critical race feminists have suggested, a woman who embodies marginalized social locations is equipped to achieve a feminist standpoint. For example, Sandoval (2000) argues that all women with marginalized social locations are able to develop an oppositional consciousness that brings valuable knowledge to the development of a feminist standpoint.

Through this research, however, I found that there are multiple ways for an individual woman to achieve a feminist standpoint. Women can contribute to a feminist standpoint based on the privileged aspects of their social locations if they can see their role in creating and enacting oppression and take responsibility. For example, women with social locations of relative privilege can achieve a feminist standpoint by becoming oppositionally conscious based on this identity. Brenda illustrated this perspective as she revealed (August 10, 2009):

I really do believe I have to say, that in all the years I’ve done adult education that has been for me the key, “to what degree am I able to transform myself, in terms of my own location?”

In this way, I feel that the achievement of a feminist standpoint is accessible to all women regardless of their social locations.
At the same time, the findings of this research also make an argument for working with differently-located women in order to contribute to a collective standpoint. Each woman brings an embodied knowledge of certain oppressions/standpoints that are accessible only to them based on the bodies and lived realities they inhabit. Therefore, I feel that a collective process of consciousness-raising will be effective in illuminating oppositional consciousness that incorporates an intersectionality and interlocking identities perspective because differently-located women each bring different perspectives and possibilities to the process.

**Limitations of Intersectionality and Interlocking Identities Frameworks**

This research uncovered several limitations of intersectionality and interlocking identities frameworks in praxis. As mentioned, praxis that related to attending to multiple differences within an individual woman and ideas related to how individual social locations are interconnected and co-constituted with those of others were not overwhelmingly present with the majority of the educators. At the same time, educators expressed many ideas about the multitude of social locations within an individual woman that resonated with intersectionality and many practices that raised consciousness about how individual social locations are interconnected and co-constituted with those of others. This suggests to me a certain limitation in either the usefulness or applicability of these frameworks in the educators' practices. On the one hand, this may suggest that the educators were not entirely capable of facilitating learning processes that took up social locations in a nuanced fashion or were aware of the co-constructed nature of social locations.

One the other hand, this may suggest that it is not possible to keep all aspects of identity salient. In Chapter Four, I found that educators feel that it is difficult, and even a barrier to their
practice, that they are not able to keep all aspects of identity on the table. I question whether the
goal of keeping all aspects of identity on the table is doable, or even desirable, in terms of
addressing intersectional and interlocking oppressions. Based on my research, I think that
educators are focused on trying to address oppressions, while the scholars that theorize these
same oppressions are trying to nuance the intricacy of oppressions; in the process, these scholars
may idealize the possibility of attending to all forms of oppression simultaneously.

My sense is that intersectionality is valuable because it names multiple differences and, in
doing so, raises the need to address women’s multiple social locations. However, an
intersectionality framework in and of itself does not address how to work across differences. In
this way, intersectionality and interlocking oppression theorists do not necessarily go beyond
what women know in practice, but do go beyond what feminist educators are able to do in
practice within non-credit learning processes.

For educators who have a lived experience of multiple aspects of marginalization and
who are oppositionally conscious or have achieved a feminist standpoint (oppositional
consciousness) their praxis often resonated with intersectionality and interlocking identities
frameworks. I think that these frameworks have put into language what these educators already
knew to be true about social locations and power, which is only now being appreciated and
legitimized in the academy through this development in feminist discourse.

Another limitation of intersectionality and interlocking identities frameworks is the lack
of clarity in direction and precedent in utilizing it in praxis. The ambiguities of intersectionality,
which I described earlier, may explain why pedagogies and approaches that named and
addressed racism took precedence in the most effective practices I uncovered. Anti-racism praxis
is focused on race and racism, and this focus makes it a more accessible and manageable practice for educators and learners to engage in.

The struggle to deal with multiple subjectivities while still focusing on race is built into intersectionality theory, since as mentioned it stems from critical race theory (Nash, 2008). I believe that Crenshaw’s conceptualization of intersectionality was meant to be taken up in terms of other aspects of marginalization, but these connections were not fully articulated and have remained fuzzy for many theorists. This leaves me wondering: do intersectionality and interlocking identities frameworks promote understanding that enables women to work across a broad range of differences?

Based on this research, I also question whether intersectionality and interlocking identities frameworks have provided a diversion for educators and learners who want to focus on aspects of their social locations that they find easier to explore. As the educators mentioned, there is a tendency for individuals to focus on aspects of identity that they are able to address. Intersectionality, in particular, creates a framework to explore multiple social locations but does not specify a starting point for this exploration or whether certain social locations should be salient in this exploration. It also does not specify how many social locations should be explored or in what sequence. As a result, educators and learners alike may use an intersectionality framework to address only those aspects of identity that is familiar or comfortable. In this way, using an intersectionality framework can divert from the project of addressing more challenging aspects of identity and in employing analytic lenses associated with race, class, religious affiliation, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, age and gender.

At their best, the frameworks of intersectionality and interlocking identities are holistic, speak to differently-situated women’s fractured experiences and provide women with a way to
conceptualize their unique embodied knowledges, including spiritual and emotional dimensions. I think that educators who embrace these embodied knowledges and integrate these ways of knowing will be better equipped to raise women learners’ consciousness in a way that enables women’s solidarity to flourish.

I can also see, however, that educators may be disappointed with the theories of intersectionality and interlocking identities if they imagine them as an effective and harmonious solution to working across difference that has yet to be envisioned or enacted. By imposing theory on human relationships, intersectionality may create a false expectation, leading feminist educators into thinking that they are able to do something impossible.

**Each Distinct Learning Practice Creates an Entry Point to Foster a Systemic Analysis**

There is always a gap between what is theorized and what is possible in practice. Practices that teach critical consciousness of one’s intersecting and interlocking identities is no exception. In this research I found that a critical consciousness based on all these complexities of identity was not achieved through feminist non-credit learning processes. I would argue that this is not due to any shortcomings in the ways that the feminist educators conceptualized or carried out their learning processes. Instead, I would suggest that these theoretical concepts were meant to act as tools for reflection and inspiration for social movements rather than serving an evaluative framework for individual educational and organizing efforts.

The fact that the educators were not succeeding at delving into (or trying to delve into) all aspects of social locations in terms of how they conceptualized and conducted their learning practice could be regarded as a part of what made their processes successful. While
intersectionality scholars underline the importance of making no one aspect of identity salient, in practice this is impractical, if not impossible. In this research, I found that this gap between theory and practice was not a bad thing.

Instead it was achievable, and desirable, to approach learning about difference by articulating and exploring one distinct aspect of identity, oppression, and power within a learning process. This enabled educators and learners to go more deeply and to learn profoundly from one aspect of identity or social location. This single social location acted as an entry point, which could then enable learners to bridge into exploring connections to other aspects of social location. This exploration of different aspects of identity brought different pieces to the overall understanding of identity, power and oppression.

Each Distinct Learning Practice Adds to Feminist Social Movements

In addition to providing a concrete entry point, all these practices were cumulative, adding up to create intersectional awareness within the larger feminist movements. It has been noted that the strength of the women’s movement lies in the fact that it is broad, varied and has an integrated and connected structure (Hess, 1994; Marx Feree & Tarrow, 1998). New social movements, such as the feminisms with which the feminist educators connect and organize around informal “networks composed of a multiplicity of groups that are dispersed, fragmented and submerged in everyday life” (Melucci, 1989, p. 60). As Tarrow (1998) argues, opportunities for social change provide incentives for others to join in collective action. These actions are diffused and feed into larger cycles of contention. If these cycles become pronounced enough, the contention gives rise to a revolution (p. 24). This suggests that feminist movements make
gains as each learning process contributes a specific perspective of women’s oppression, thus building greater intersectional and interlocking awareness within the movement as a whole.

Through their individual contributions, each educator in the study impacted on the movement to further feminisms through their specific approach. Mika’s practice went deeply into colonialism, Sam’s into (dis)ability, and so on. Each learning process assists in unravelling the interlocking systems of colonialism, ableism (and so on) that come into existence through one another. From this perspective, the learning processes examined in this dissertation each contribute particular knowledges and practices that strengthen feminist praxes and movements.

What Research Findings Suggest for Praxis

In summary, this research makes several suggestions for educators who wish to develop praxes that raise women learners’ consciousness around issues of identity and power from an intersectionality and interlocking identities perspective. This research will inform my practice as an educator who works in feminist non-credit learning spaces.

This research helps to contextualize the learning process, so educators can put their work within a larger societal context. The diagram below, Figure 10. (Dynamics of women coming together to gain consciousness of identity, power & oppression through non-credit learning processes), illustrates a way to think about effective learning processes. This diagram was conceived as a summary of research findings, and further developed after feedback from the educators at a focus group. In this diagram, the centre of the learning process is the surfacing of conflict in order to promote consciousness and learning. This needs to be done within an atmosphere of true safety (as opposed to safety as it is evoked by women wishing to avoid taking
responsibility for their privilege) and vulnerability and trust where educators model humanness and the openness of learners is encouraged.

The text outside of the concentric circles in the diagram describes the social, political and economic climate surrounding the learning process and the impacts these have on the environment within the learning process. The text above the circles denotes environment or contextual factors that educators mentioned both surrounding and within the learning process. As the educators argued, this environment is one of a culture of fear, defensiveness privileging fear and general complacency, which are the results of an individual’s denial and loss of innocence and trust (November 12, 2009). The text below the concentric circles denotes the conflict that is either produced or raised as a result of these environmental conditions that may result in learners discomfort or disengagement (November 12, 2009).
**Environment Surrounding the Learning Process**

Culture of Fear/Defensiveness Privileging Fear/Complacency
[Resulting from Denial/Loss (of Innocence, Trust)]

![Diagram](image)

**Environment within the Learning Process**

*Figure 10.* Dynamics of women coming together to gain consciousness of identity, power & oppression through non-credit learning processes.

This diagram is helpful as a way to relate what is happening outside the group to the dynamic occurring inside the group because it relates to what is happening in the social, political and economic climate. I think that comparing the dialectic that is happening outside the group to the dynamic occurring inside the group also facilitates a connection between the systemic and personal levels of analysis with learners.

This research also demonstrates the value of longer term learning processes that enable learners to reach a deeper level of analysis. Educators need to be creative with programming. As
Kathryn Church argues, the only way to sustain education and community building for social change is to adapt programming to what funders or bureaucrats deem important, as opposed to being static about how you meet the ideals of your process (lecture notes, AEC1145H Participatory Research in the Community and Workplace, November 13, 2001). In the 1980s, Church ran “consumer-survivor” support groups. In the 1990s, when this work was no longer deemed relevant, she morphed her work into community economic development projects, which was the current trend in government funding. She, along with others, created the Raging Spoon Catering Company, a “consumer-survivor” businesses operating under the umbrella of the Ontario Council of Alternative Businesses (The Raging Spoon Catering Company, n.d). This micro enterprise employed consumer/survivors and enabled them to continue to meet, organize and support one another.

Church's actions provide a good example of how to maintain important processes even when faced with a lack of political support, like the majority of women’s programs and services. However, this strategy is only recommended if the learning process is able to maintain its integrity. This depends on the administration’s ability to access funding in ways that do not usurp the learning process itself.

The findings of this research are also instructive for educators who manage processes that take place over a shorter period of time. This research highlighted the need to contain the learning objectives for short term learning processes, as well as how to engage in learning about identity, power and difference in ways that can be contained and are manageable for both learners and educators.

39 “Consumer-survivor” is the term that Kathryn Church and the Raging Spoon group used. However, anti-psychiatry proponents and a high percentage of people who identify as survivors contested this term and feel it does not adequately convey their experience of oppression.
Finally, through this research, I realized that there is a need to clarify both the definition and the applicability of intersectionality in practice. Intersectionality needs to be reframed as a strategy for addressing and working across differences. Educators must realize that they cannot hold all elements of difference in one's analysis and work through these elements simultaneously. I would argue that an understanding of the multiple social locations and consciousnesses within any individual woman could be achieved if educators utilized a range of different lenses through which to understand a situation or dynamic. An intersectional approach would then mean applying varying lenses (such as looking at heteronormativity, gender, ability, race, etc.) in sequence as ways to understand a situation from a variety of different perspectives. Using a variety of different lenses for analysis and bringing different perspectives to the situation in sequence would also ideally help educators to ensure that they are not favouring one lens.

**Directions for Further Research**

Based on this research, there are several areas which would merit further exploration. This research could also be fruitfully extended by experimenting with the design of curriculum or learning activities, particularly based on more extensive work ahead of time into understanding learners’ prior knowledge, experience and their expectations.

In this project, I focused on the opinions and experiences of feminist educators. It would be valuable, however, to do further research to explore how learning processes affected learners’ understanding and action around identity, power and difference. Such research would also enable educators to gain perspective on the longer term outcomes of women’s consciousness-raising learning processes, which they are not often able to witness.
This research also focused on educators' social locations and explored the potential relationship between an educator’s identity, the achievement of standpoint and the educator’s ability to lead learners in processes that resonated with achieving a feminist standpoint. In order to be more conclusive about this relationship, a study could focus specifically on this subject and examine a larger sample of educators that includes more social locations within the group that do not focus on race. The perspective of such a study would be valuable in helping educators to consider the objectives of the learning processes they conduct based on a greater understanding of the relationship between their social locations, processes that connect with the notion of achieving a feminist standpoint and the effectiveness of the consciousness-raising processes they lead.

It would also be interesting to pursue in depth case studies with the educators I felt were successful in raising consciousness around complex ideas of identity and difference within a context of bringing women together to work for positive social change; this would involve more extensive interviewing that articulated specificities about the learners participating in the process, the approaches taken and the outcomes that were experienced with educators I felt were successful.

This work could also be fruitfully extended by further exploring several educators’ peripheral comments about the ways in which they found traditional anti-oppression or anti-racism trainings were not particularly effective. Specifically, the educators spoke about how such processes often target and scapegoat racialized and marginalized members of organizations. It would be interesting to learn more about the outcomes of traditional anti-oppression or anti-racism trainings, and potentially to do a comparative study of processes that teach about anti-
oppression, such as traditional anti-oppression trainings and learning processes that incorporate this analysis.

The findings of this research focused a great deal on the use of challenges, as well as the educators’ difficulties with challenging women based on their social locations of privilege. Again, I would stress the use of compassionate challenges, and suggest further research could focus on the pedagogies and practices for compassionately challenging privilege, expanding on work such as Anne Curry Steven’s (2005) work, called “Pedagogy for the Privileged.” I would argue for the value of a distinct and possibly even a separate space or approach for focusing on addressing privilege. However, as a caveat, I feel more work is needed on pedagogies and practices that incorporate an intersectional approach which acknowledges the complexity of social locations and the nuances of being simultaneously privileged as well as oppressed in such a way that it does not facilitate “racing toward innocence.”

Furthermore, I continue to be curious about what enables an educator to excel in this work. One aspect that was highlighted to me was the value of possessing a critical analysis in facilitating learning processes for others. The ways in which individuals develop a critical analysis, particularly if their analysis is not facilitated by embodied experience of marginalization, remains unexplored through this research. Further research could explore the processes by which educators develop and utilize critical analysis. This could also include investigating what supports would strengthen educators' processes of developing and utilizing critical analysis, such as the personal and healing work mentioned in this dissertation.

Finally, this research also raised interesting points about identity. One of the most valuable aspects of this research was that it brought women together to learn with and from one another across differences within the context of learning processes that valued women’s
solidarity. Within this, there was the premise of identifying as women. Future research could consider Trans and (dis)abled women and their complicated relationship with the category “woman” in order to enable learning processes that address this disconnect.
References


Appendix A:
Email Requesting Referrals for Feminist Educators

Hi [name of feminist educator],

Happy New Year! I hope you are great… and not totally snowed in! It has been a long time since we connected, but you have been on my mind.

I’m now at the stage of my PhD, where I am diving into my research. My focus is on feminist learning processes for social justice, and I would really value your suggestions. I am in the process of asking people whose opinion I respect for ideas, and then I will approach people to have interviews with me.

I am interested in knowing who you think is an excellent feminist educator. I’m looking to understand what learning processes work well to raise feminist consciousness, and understanding across differences between women of different social locations. I’m trying to be sort of democratic, but unfortunately I can’t necessarily interview everyone doing this work.

The criteria for the educators are individuals who:

- Have designed and facilitated a non-credit learning process (outside of a formal school setting) in an urban centre of Ontario for/with at least two groups of women in the last ten years
- Work from a feminist perspective to develop women participants’ feminist consciousness, understanding between diverse women and social action through non-credit learning processes. (These processes could be connected to any content/subject area; the important thing is they promote analysis to name patriarchy and the ways in which it operates. They don’t have to use this kind of language, but get at the idea.)
- Represent diverse social locations
- Last but not least - are people you consider to be successful in designing and facilitating such processes

Think about it and let me know in the next couple of weeks if you can. Don’t worry about any kind of social pressures to name or not name people - whatever you say can remain between us. I’d love to hear about as many people as you can think of who fits these criteria, along with their contact information if you have it, so that I can get in touch with them and explain more.

If you have questions or prefer to talk instead of write, please give me a call [phone number]. I appreciate your help!!

Take care,
~Christine

Christine McKenzie
PhD. Candidate
Adult Education and Community Development
Appendix B:
Request To Participate In Feminist Learning Research

Dear [name of feminist educator],

I hope you are doing well. My name is Christine McKenzie and I am a popular educator, feminist and presently a PhD student in Adult Education at OISE. I am writing on the reference of [name].

I am writing you now to see if you would be interested in participating in my research project on non-credit feminist learning processes. The purpose of this research is to identify and assess the ways in which educators in urban Ontario utilize feminist learning practices to raise consciousness and promote understanding between women of diverse social locations, and catalyze participants’ engagement in activities for social change through facilitated non-credit learning processes.

In this research I am going to interview feminist educators, and possibly participants from their process(es). My selection method was to ask other educators and people who work with women their opinion about who is doing great work in this area. I am contacting you because have been recommended to me.

The criteria for educators are individuals who:
- Work from a feminist perspective to develop women's feminist consciousness, critical thinking and social action
- Have designed and facilitated learning processes for/with at least two groups of women
- Are considered by those who are knowledgeable to be successful in facilitating women’s non-credit learning
- Hosted their learning processes through an organization, located in an urban centre in Ontario
- Conducted their learning processes within the last 10 years

If you think you may be interested in participating I would like to set up a brief phone call to ensure you fit the criteria and to answer any questions you may have. After I have spoken to all educators that are potentially interested, I will be selecting a few who are interested to participate in my research. The purpose of narrowing down the number of educator through this selection process is to ensure that a wide variation of social locations and experiences are represented among the participant group.

Those participating in the research will take part in two interviews with me, and a short focus group with the other feminist educators participating. All interviews and the focus group will be scheduled at your convenience within the next six months. At the time of the interviews, we can also discuss the possibility that I also recruit women who were part of one of your learning processes to be part of my research. If this were feasible, I would recruit these women through the hosting agency and not through you directly. Agreeing to have me recruit women participants
from your processes is not a requirement to you participating in this research. I am most interested in talking to educators! I know you have many insights...

I look forward to hearing from you by (date) either way, and answering any questions.

Take care,

~Christine

Christine McKenzie
Doctoral Student
Adult Education and Community Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
Appendix C:
Screening Call Script

Criteria for the Educators

- What kinds of non-credit learning processes (outside of a formal school setting) have you designed and facilitated for groups of women? Name all processes that might apply for this research study
- What were the goals of the process?
- How many facilitators were there?
- In what ways do you work from a feminist perspective?
- In what ways were these groups of women diverse?
- How many groups have you done this process with? (at least two groups of women)
- Where did they take place? (an urban centre of Ontario)
- In what time span? How recently? (in the last ten years)

Maximum variation self-identification

- Age - decade
- Education level
- Socio economic status/class
- Race/ethnicity
- Dis/Ability
- Sexual orientation
- Educational history
- Religion

Wrap Up

- Thanks for your time
- If definitely fulfilled maximum variation – set time for first interview
- If unsure about sampling - I will be back in touch after I talk to other participants I am screening
- Will be interviewing those that meet criteria and selecting participants in order to represent a variety of social locations
Appendix D:

Email Requesting Targeted Referrals for Feminist Educators of Specific Social locations

Hi [name of feminist educator],

How are you?

I was thinking of you because I am starting to interview people for my research and I thought you might have some ideas of people I should talk to. In my research I’m looking to understand what works in non-credit (outside of school) learning processes that raise feminist consciousness, and understanding across differences between women of different social locations. I am recruiting participants from diverse perspectives and social locations to give a broad perspective on this topic. I thought you might have ideas for women with a (dis)ability, or (dis)abilities, whose practices meet these criteria.

I know you probably have ideas for women that do not have (dis)abilities too (which I would love to hear about!), and that you are not all about the (dis)abilities community. I thought it made sense to start asking with who I know... going to the DAWN website was a little overwhelming, impersonal, and out of date!

So, the criteria for the educators are individuals who:

- Have designed and facilitated a non-credit learning process in an urban centre of Ontario for/with at least two groups of women in the last ten years
- Work from a feminist perspective to develop women participants’ feminist consciousness, understanding across differences between women of different social locations and social action through non-credit learning processes. (These processes could be connected to any content/subject area; the important thing is they promote analysis to name patriarchy and oppression and the ways in which it operates. Participants don’t have to use language such as feminism or patriarchy, as long as they work from an aligned perspective).
- Represent diverse social locations
- Last but not least - are people you consider to be successful in planning and facilitating such processes

Perhaps you have ideas of women who could potentially participate in my research or others whose advice I could ask? I would be very interested in your thoughts...

Take care,

~Christine
[Phone number]

Christine McKenzie
PhD. Candidate
Adult Education and Community Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto
Appendix E:
Feminist Educators Social Locations

- **Sexual Orientation**
  - Lesbian 50%
  - Queer 20%
  - Straight 20%
  - Two-Spirit 10%

- **Caregiver?**
  - Caregiver 40%
  - Not Caregiver 60%

- **Religious Affiliation**
  - Did not identify 70%
  - Jewish 20%
  - Catholic 10%

- **Education Level**
  - Masters 50%
  - PhD 20%
  - Undergraduate 30%
Appendix F: Educators Interview General Question Guide

General Questions

Process

- (Given non-credit learning processes with differently-located, for feminist consciousness-raising around issues of identity, power and privilege) Tell me about your most successful facilitation experience.
- Why was it successful?
  - What was the context - what organization?
  - How many women?
  - How many facilitators?
  - What topic(s) focused on, what was curriculum?
  - What processes, practices or approaches did you use?

- In a facilitation setting, what has worked and what did not work (to bring diverse women together for CR and social action)?
  - Did you share experience(s)? If so, in what ways? What were the strengths of pitfalls of this approach?
  - Was CR a component of your work? If so, in what ways?
  - What (else) helped women to come together to learn about differences?
  - When is learning across difference most able to happen in groups of women? In what context?

Learning about Difference

- What did the women participating learn about difference? (probe based on age, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, religion)
- How do you navigate the tension of solidarity vs. understanding or dissecting social locations, or looking at oppression?
- How do you get people to go into these topics if they are resistant?
- Are there times when you “go there,” and times when do you not? What determines this for you?

Social Change

- What changes, towards more consciousness have you seen in participants, if any?
- What lessons did you learn?
- What would you do differently?

Facilitators Locations

- Do you feel your identity has an impact on how you facilitate a group of women? If so, in what ways?
Appendix G:

Educators Specific Interview Question Guide

Specific Questions

Describe Process
- (Based on the particular context that we are focusing on in this research, which you feel has been successful) describe in detail what you feel supported differently-located women in raising consciousness and promoting understanding around multiple, intersecting or interlocking identities and oppressions?
  - Imagine I have never seen or experienced such a process. Walk me through the process; what did the room looks like, who is there and what happens from start to finish?
- How would this process be different than another context? Or with different participants?
- What worked and what did not work (to raise consciousness and understanding around multiple, intersecting or interlocking identities and oppressions)?
  - How do you take up the idea of safety or safe spaces?
  - Does participant discomfort ever happen? How do you work with this?
  - What role does identity or social locations play in process? For participants? For you?
  - What role does power play in process? For participants? For you?
- In terms of helping women to learn or become conscious and work across differences what does success look like?
  - What was the most effective learning practice, or practices, that allowed women to raising their consciousness and gain a greater understanding around multiple, intersecting or interlocking identities and oppressions?
  - How do you know it was effective? How do you know your process “works?”

Lessons Learned
- When you were running a typical group in the beginning of your practice what would I see? Walk me through it?
- Now today how is that different?
- What did you decide that made these changes in your practice?
- What of accepted political understandings have you changed you mind about in the last 3 years?
- In terms of your practice and what you find works - What do you believe you would be ashamed for your feminist colleagues to know? (About how you design or facilitate a process?)

Learning about Difference
- There are some aspects of difference you did not mention before. In terms of difference and identity does
  - Transgendered or transsexual identities ever come up?
Did refugees or undocumented status as an identity ever been taken up in your processes?
Did (dis)ability ever come up?
- Do you have transgendered women (M to F, or transitioning F to M) that have participated in one of your processes? Did this affect how identity, difference and power were taken up? In what ways?
- Ask this for other social locations - refugees or undocumented, homeless, (dis)abled, etc.

Challenging
- Do you challenge participants’ analysis?
  - If yes, under what circumstances? When is challenging productive and when is it not?
  - If no, why not?

Safety
- What does it mean to you to have a safe space?
- How do you create safety in the group?
- Where is safety valuable? Where does it get in the way?
- How do you get people outside of their comfort zone?
- How do you know if it’s gone too far? Or not far enough?
- Some people frame safety like this (describe previous findings). What is your take on this?
- Use of small groups for example– when do you use this? When is it most useful? What are the benefits of doing it that way? When would you not do it that way?
- What does it mean in your practice?

Outcomes
- What did participants walk away with in terms of learnings (raising consciousness and promoting understanding around multiple, intersecting or interlocking identities and oppressions?)
  - In what ways do you think this was it different based on their social locations?
- How you know a session/process has been successful in terms of a participant gaining a greater perspective on their identity as intersectional and understanding others who are differently-located?
  - What is your hope at the end of a session?
  - How do you know when has this happened?
- What changes, towards more consciousness have you seen in participants, if any?

Social Change
- In what ways do you think that processes that involve women of different identities that aim to create understanding across differences do for broader social movements?
Appendix H: Educators Focus Group Question Guide

Focus Group Questions

Part 1

Read definition intersecting/interlocking

Intersectionality

Kimberle Williams Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality, drawing on the metaphor of an intersection. For Crenshaw the intersection is the place where each person’s multiple social locations, or identities, meet as a crossroads. It is this space of the crossroads that depicts the way that all facets of identity are separate yet joined simultaneously. Through this metaphor Crenshaw expressed that the more identities of oppression one occupies - considering the barriers of racism, sexism, heteronormativity, classism (among others) - the more difficult it will be to cross the intersection, or exist free of impediment (Crenshaw, 1989).

Her notion of intersectionality was born in response to the way identity is compartmentalized within the law and other realms, making it possible to be considered a woman, or a person of colour, but not both simultaneously. Crenshaw saw that “although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices” (1995, p. 357). While originally conceptualized to focus on the juncture of racism and sexism, I take up intersectionality as a way to consider a wide variety of social locations, including race, gender, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, ability, religious affiliation and citizenship status.

Interlocking Oppressions

Razack & Fellows (1998) define interlocking oppression as the ways in which systems of oppression come into existence in and through one another so that class exploitation could not be accomplished without gender and racial hierarchies; imperialism could not function without class exploitation, sexism, heterosexism, and so on (p. 1). Interlocking oppression accounts for how race, class, gender (as well as other identities) co-constitute one another in ways that cannot be separated in White supremacist capitalist patriarchy (Razack & Fellows, 1998, p. 3).

1. Focusing on the specific context we have been discussing - Let’s say I came to your group, what would I see you doing to raise the consciousness of differently-located women to integrate issues of intersecting and interlocking oppressions into their understanding?
   o Some participants in this research have talked about integrating issues of intersecting oppressions into women’s understanding by leading a discussion
using analogy to draw parallels between aspects of identity (for example between (dis)ability & genocide, segregation). What is your take on this?
  o Does the issue of differences within any category of identity come up in your group? If so, how would I see this happening in your group? When would you know women are ready to “go there?”

2. Focusing on the specific context we have been discussing - What would I see in your educational practices that makes it specific to working with women?
   o If I came to your group what would I see that was different if it was a co-ed, or a men’s group?

3. Some participants in this research have noted that women in groups can be catty, competitive and judgemental with each other. Focusing on the specific context we have been discussing - Have you found this to be true?
   o If so, how do you address this reality in your role as an educator?

4. For the purposes of this research I am using CR to mean a movement building methodology, or a collection of methods used to further women’s liberation. The process is not “therapy,” which implies the existence of individual solutions. CR “implicitly valued women and tried to understand and develop strategies to change power relationships between men and women and between and among women” (Crow, 2000:20). The main method of CR refers to a small group process that involves the stages of opening up, sharing, analysing and abstracting.
   o Focusing on the specific context we have been discussing - Does your practices take up these principles and method of CR practice? In what way(s)?
   o Let’s say I came to your group, how would I see you practicing the principles or method of CR practice?
   o In what ways do your educational practices not uphold these principles? Why? What is missing from these principles or method of CR practice for you?
   o Conscious raising practice, or CR, from the 1960-70s has been said to be a way to “resolve inner conflicts as a privileged woman” and has been critiqued as very problematic because of the way it excluded the experiences of many women in practice. How do you view this?

5. Focusing on the specific context we have been discussing - How do you think your work in promoting understanding of difference between differently-located women contributes to larger movements for social change?
Part 2
Reflections on findings in Figure 11.

*Figure 11. Dynamics of gaining consciousness of identity, power and oppression in women’s non-credit learning processes.*

1. Questions or clarifications about what you see?

2. What is your response to the depiction of these findings:
   - What do you see in the same way?
   - How would you label these themes differently?
   - How would you relate categories or themes differently?
   - What themes should relate to other headings?
   - What words might you use in different ways, which would suggest a different relationship to the other themes?
   - What themes do you think should be there, which are not?

4. In what ways are the feminist learning practices pictured here specific to working with women? What would you add (about your context) thinking about working with women?

5. In what ways are there overlaps, or intersections, between what you found works for you and what works in other contexts? Why is this significant?

6. How is what worked in other contexts different from what you found worked for you in your context? Why?
7. What alternate depiction of the findings would you propose? (For this portion we will be using post-it notes to make our own diagram)
Appendix I:
Permission to Cite Extensively from Copyrighted Materials

Sent: Tuesday, October 26, 2010 8:39 AM
To: 'Christine McKenzie'
Subject: RE: permission to cite material

Hi Christine,
Yes, we give permission,
Thank you,
Tatiana

From: Christine McKenzie [mailto:c-mckenzie@sympatico.ca]
Sent: October-24-10 10:06 AM
To: Tatiana Fraser
Subject: permission to cite material

Hi Tatiana,

See you soon..!

I am writing to get your permission to have quoted a GAF resource at length in my doctoral thesis… standard paperwork is attached and copied below.

take care,

Christine

October 23, 2010

Re: Permission to Use Copyrighted Material in a Doctoral Thesis

Dear Tatiana Fraser, Girls Action Foundation Executive Director:

I am a University of Toronto graduate student completing my Doctoral thesis entitled Exploring intersectionality, unravelling interlocking oppressions: Feminist non-credit learning processes. My thesis will be available via the U of T Libraries in digital formats, for reference, study and/or copy for scholarly purposes. I will also be granting Library and Archives Canada and ProQuest/UMI a non-exclusive license to reproduce, loan, distribute, or sell single copies of my thesis by any means and in any form or format. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you.

I would like permission to allow inclusion of the following material in my thesis: The activity description for, “Multiple Jeopardy Conga Line: Our Intersecting Identities,” which was

Please confirm in writing or by email that these arrangements meet with your approval.

Sincerely,

Christine McKenzie
PhD. Candidate
Adult Education and Community Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Women and Gender Studies
University of Toronto

**Sent:** Wednesday, November 03, 2010 3:22 PM  
**To:** c-mckenzie@sympatico.ca  
**Subject:** Permission to cite

Dear Christine,

We are granting you permission to quote the CRIAW resource *Everyone Belongs: A Toolkit for Applying Intersectionality* at length in your dissertation.

Best wishes in your academic endeavours.

Judy  
CRIAW Board President  
Judy White, PhD RSW
Associate Professor
Faculty of Social Work
University of Regina  
1(306)664-7375  
judy.white@uregina.ca

November 2, 2010

Re: Permission to Use Copyrighted Material in a Doctoral Thesis

Dear Judy White, CRIAW Board Chair:

I am a University of Toronto graduate student completing my Doctoral thesis entitled *Exploring intersectionality, unravelling interlocking oppressions: Feminist non-credit learning processes*. 


My thesis will be available via the U of T Libraries in digital formats, for reference, study and/or copy for scholarly purposes. I will also be granting Library and Archives Canada and ProQuest/UMI a non-exclusive license to reproduce, loan, distribute, or sell single copies of my thesis by any means and in any form or format. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you.

I would like permission to allow inclusion of the following material in my thesis: The activity description for, “How Many of You… Exploring Our Own Oppressions.” This activity was designed by Joanne Simpson (2009) and appeared in *Everyone Belongs: A Toolkit for Applying Intersectionality*, sponsored by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW).

Please confirm in writing or by email that these arrangements meet with your approval.

Sincerely,

Christine McKenzie
PhD. Candidate
Adult Education and Community Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Women and Gender Studies
University of Toronto

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**Sent:** Thursday, December 16, 2010 9:55 PM  
**To:** Christine McKenzie  
**Subject:** Re: Permission to cite your activity in my thesis?

Dear Christine,

I'm writing with permission to cite CAW materials (as outlined in your letter) in your dissertation.

I look forward to reading your paper and wish you all the best with it - it is sure to be an important contribution to our field.

Have an excellent holiday.

In solidarity,

Sue Carter  
CAW National Representative

December 16, 2010

Re: Permission to Use Copyrighted Material in a Doctoral Thesis
Dear Sue Carter:

I am a University of Toronto graduate student completing my Doctoral thesis entitled *Exploring intersectionality, unravelling interlocking oppressions: Feminist non-credit learning processes.*

My thesis will be available via the U of T Libraries in digital formats, for reference, study and/or copy for scholarly purposes. I will also be granting Library and Archives Canada and ProQuest/UMI a non-exclusive license to reproduce, loan, distribute, or sell single copies of my thesis by any means and in any form or format. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you.

I would like permission to allow inclusion of the following material in my thesis: The activity description for the activity I have called, “Holding my Sisters Hand.” This activity was designed by Sue Carter (2009) and was developed for the human rights program, sponsored by the Canadian Auto Workers Union.

Please confirm in writing or by email that these arrangements meet with your approval.

Sincerely,

Christine McKenzie
PhD. Candidate
Adult Education and Community Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Women and Gender Studies
University of Toronto

---

Sent: Tuesday, November 09, 2010 10:12 AM  
To: Christine McKenzie  
Subject: Re: Permission to cite SOA Watch material

Hello Christine,

On behalf of Father Roy, you have the permission to use SOA Watch material.

In Solidarity,

SOA Watch Staff
On Tue, Nov 2, 2010 at 8:54 AM, Christine McKenzie <c-mckenzie@sympatico.ca> wrote:

Hi,

I am hoping you can forward this letter to Fr. Roy Bourgeois, SOA Watch Founder. I am writing to get his permission on behalf of SOA Watch to have quoted an SOA Watch resource at length in my doctoral thesis. I know this material is meant to be used and enjoyed. University bureaucracy requires me to send this paperwork - attached and copied below. If you are in agreement with me citing your material you just need to reply to this email and say you give permission. I look forward to hearing from you in the next few weeks.

take care,
~ Christine

Christine McKenzie
PhD. Candidate
Adult Education and Community Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Women and Gender Studies
University of Toronto

November 2, 2010

Re: Permission to Use Copyrighted Material in a Doctoral Thesis

Dear Fr. Roy Bourgeois, School of the Americas (SOA) Watch Founder:

I am a University of Toronto graduate student completing my Doctoral thesis entitled Exploring intersectionality, unravelling interlocking oppressions: Feminist non-credit learning processes.

My thesis will be available via the U of T Libraries in digital formats, for reference, study and/or copy for scholarly purposes. I will also be granting Library and Archives Canada and ProQuest/UMI a non-exclusive license to reproduce, loan, distribute, or sell single copies of my thesis by any means and in any form or format. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you.

I would like permission to allow inclusion of the following material in my thesis: The activity called, “Learning Social Roles: Boy/Girl Piece.” This activity was designed by School of the Americas (SOA) Watch: Close the School of the Americas (1998) and appeared in their website under Gender and Sexuality Resources.

Please confirm in writing or by email that these arrangements meet with your approval.

Sincerely,
Christine McKenzie
PhD. Candidate
Adult Education and Community Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Women and Gender Studies
University of Toronto