**Evidence Based Library and Information Practice**

# Undercover Feminist Pedagogy in Information Literacy: A Literature Review

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Résumé de l'article

Objective – Feminist pedagogy in library instruction presents a new approach to actively engaging students in the research process. While feminist pedagogy in universities found early adoption in the 1970s, it is a newer phenomenon in library instruction, finding its early roots in works by Ladenson (2010), Accardi (2010), and Accardi and Vukovic (2013).

By fostering active engagement and critical thinking skills, feminist library instruction sessions encourage students to question authority, actively participate in the knowledge production process, and become aware of their power and information privilege as they navigate increasingly complex information environments. At its core, this specific pedagogical approach subverts traditional classroom dynamics by focusing on diversity and inclusion.

This literature review demonstrates how feminist pedagogy is currently being practiced in academic library information literacy sessions and how students can be assessed in a feminist manner.

Methods – Practitioners of feminist pedagogy draw on techniques and methodologies designed to emphasize and value different experiences, such as cooperative learning, collaborative learning, inquiry-based learning, and inquiry-guided learning. These techniques and methodologies are used to develop students' information literacy skills, to take ownership of the research process, and to stimulate critical inquiry.

For the literature review, the following databases were searched: Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) on the ProQuest platform; Library & Information Science Abstracts (LISA); Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts (LISTA); Scopus; and Web of Science Core Collection. Hand searching in WorldCat, as well as cited reference searching and bibliography mining, were also conducted. The searches were run between November 2018 and April 2019, followed by a second round in July 2019 based on participant feedback from the 2019 EBLIP10 conference. Case studies, books, book chapters, literature reviews, research papers, interviews, surveys, and papers based on statistical and qualitative analysis were consulted.

Results – While some librarians may lack familiarity with feminist theory, feminism writ large influences academic librarians' professional practice (Schroeder & Hollister, 2014). Librarians can incorporate feminist pedagogy into their practice and assessment in many concrete ways. However, librarians who focus on feminist pedagogy may face obstacles in their teaching, which may explain why publications on feminist pedagogical discourse within library and information studies have emerged only within the last decade (Fritch, 2018; Hackney et al., 2018). The most common challenge feminist librarians face is the restrictive nature of the standalone, one-shot information literacy session. Moreover, there is much room for improvement in library and information studies programs to introduce students to the theory and practice of feminist pedagogy.

Conclusion – This paper highlights examples of feminist methods librarians can put into practice in their information literacy sessions and ways in which students can be assessed in a feminist manner. The literature demonstrates that feminist pedagogy has been successfully implemented for decades in universities. By comparison, practicing feminist pedagogy at the library instruction level is a relatively new area of focus within the profession. Hopefully, this growing trend will lead to more evidence based literature in the near future.

**Evidence Based Library and Information Practice**

*Review Article*

## Undercover Feminist Pedagogy in Information Literacy: A Literature Review

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**Abstract**

**Objective –** Feminist pedagogy in library instruction presents a new approach to actively engaging students in the research process. While feminist pedagogy in universities found early adoption in the 1970s, it is a newer phenomenon in library instruction, finding its early roots in works by Ladenson (2010), Accardi (2010), and Accardi (2013).

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**Conclusion –** This paper highlights examples of feminist methods librarians can put into practice in their information literacy sessions and ways in which students can be assessed in a feminist manner. The literature demonstrates that feminist pedagogy has been successfully implemented for decades in universities. By comparison, practicing feminist pedagogy at the library instruction level is a relatively new area of focus within the profession. Hopefully, this growing trend will lead to more evidence based literature in the near future.

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**Introduction**

Feminist pedagogy in library instruction presents a new approach to actively engaging students in the research process. I am a liaison librarian at McGill University, which is a large research institution in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. As is the case with many librarians, I do not have a formal background in feminist studies. Instead, I discovered the concept of feminist pedagogy after the completion of my library and information studies (LIS) degree, through a position as a subject librarian for the Feminist and Gender Studies Department at the University of Ottawa. Through work organizing feminist Wikipedia edit-a-thons on International Women's Day and on Ada Lovelace Day, I expanded on my foundational knowledge of feminist theory. While my work at these standalone one-shot workshops proved to be professionally and personally rewarding, I was aware that the audience was self-selected, and I wanted to expand the reach of my practice of feminist pedagogy.

A trend I observed when teaching standalone or one-shots to undergraduate psychology students was that while the vast majority of these students were women, the first students to participate were usually without fail the male minority. I wished to foster an environment where everyone felt welcome and encouraged to

participate and therefore turned to literature on feminist pedagogy. I decided to conduct a literature review to determine how feminist pedagogy is being practiced in library information literacy sessions.

### *Definitions*

Before examining the literature surrounding feminist pedagogy in library information literacy sessions, it is important to define key terms to ensure readers are on the same page. Librarian Maria Accardi is the author of *Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction*. Published in 2013, it is a seminal work. She explains that the feminist approach is "broadly concerned with social justice and sees education as a site for social change and transformation, exposing and ending oppression against women and all other kinds of marginalization: racism, xenophobia, classism, ableism, and so on" (p. 39). She goes on to explain, "Beyond simply understanding how knowledge is produced, feminist library instructors encourage students to be agents of change, thus transforming the dominant culture of knowledge production" (p. 39).
Critical information literacy was popularized by LIS professor James Elmborg in 2006, and it asks librarians to encourage students to think critically about the information they encounter, be it academic or otherwise, and to develop what can be understood as a "critical consciousness" (p. 192). Accardi acknowledges that feminist pedagogy is a form of critical pedagogy, noting that feminist educators are concerned with learner-centered, anti-hierarchical, collaborative, and participatory learning environments that value personal narratives. Accardi states:

Critical library pedagogy asks educators to consider the context in which students are situated in their everyday lives and consider these contexts as they plan library instruction. Feminist library pedagogy goes further, by encouraging instructors to include the lives and knowledge of students in their lesson planning

and to teach from the standpoint that all knowing is partial. (pp. 13-14)

The theory of intersectionality was developed in 1989 by feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. The term gained visibility in academic writing when feminist activists such as author and professor bell hooks (1994) described the multiple oppressions faced by black women to be intersectional oppressions. Intersectionality attempts to identify how various forms of social stratification (such as race, class, religion, sexual orientation, gender, age, and disability) interlock with systems of power to impact those who are most marginalized in society. As articulated by hooks (2015), the emergence of intersectionality "challenged the notion that 'gender' was the primary factor determining a woman's fate" (p. xiii).

### *History*

Grounded in feminist theory, feminist pedagogy in higher education emerged in the 1970s, born out of three dramatic upheavals: the women's movement, rapidly changing student demographics, and a demand for more inclusive and egalitarian knowledge across all scholarly disciplines. The first instance of the concept of feminist pedagogy appeared in 1981 in an essay by Dr. Berenice M. Fisher, titled "What is Feminist Pedagogy?" Its aims, broadly speaking, are to encourage students "to gain an education that would be relevant to their concerns, to create their own meanings, and to find their own voices in relation to the material" (Maher & Tetreault, 2001, p. 4). For their part, Maher and Tetreault's pioneering 1994 work *The Feminist Classroom* (later updated in 2011) draws on in-class observations and in-depth interviews with both professors and students at six American colleges and universities. It examines the feminist pedagogical approach of professors over a period of two decades. Their work, which also examined the dynamics of gender, race, and privilege, demonstrates that feminist pedagogy has the potential to transform any classroom. It

is about the way teachers teach, regardless of the classroom's subject matter.

With regards to feminist pedagogy within the field of LIS, the earliest seminal work of note is librarian Sharon Ladenson's book chapter "Paradigm Shift: Utilizing Critical Feminist Pedagogy in Library Instruction," published in 2010. Ladenson includes an overview of the core tenets of feminist pedagogy, including its resistance to passive student behaviour and dedication to active learning, critical thinking, cooperation, collaboration, difference, and diversity. Ladenson's chapter went on to inform Accardi's aforementioned 2013 work, *Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction*: "Feminism already is, in a way, informing our teaching practices, in that library instruction favors active learning, a nurturing environment, and learner-centered pedagogy. We are already doing this. Why make the politics more explicit? Because this is how social change happens" (pp. 57-58). In her 2014 article "Cyborgs in the academic library: A cyberfeminist approach to information literacy instruction," librarian Gina Schlesselman-Tarango points out that we in libraries are sadly behind the times when it comes to practicing feminist pedagogy. Schlesselman-Tarango writes: "Feminist pedagogy and library instruction are relatively new bedfellows, and while feminist techniques have likely been employed in library instruction for some time, this approach to information literacy has only recently been explored in detail" (p. 38).

**Aims**

This literature review seeks to examine how feminist pedagogy is being practiced in academic library information literacy sessions and whether students can be assessed in a feminist manner. It aims to provide concrete examples of how to put feminist pedagogy into practice. It also seeks to highlight challenges that librarians might face when practicing feminist pedagogy and provide, where possible, suggestions for addressing these challenges.

Furthermore, it will discuss how students may be evaluated in a feminist manner and provide cases taken from the literature.

**Methods**

The following databases were searched: Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) on the ProQuest platform; Library & Information Science Abstracts (LISA); Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts (LISTA); Scopus; and Web of Science Core Collection. The author also performed hand searching in WorldCat for books and book chapters. Search terms included feminis* AND (pedagog* OR teach* OR educ* OR instruct*) AND librar*. The study benefited from cited reference searching and bibliography mining to identify related articles that may not have explicitly referred to feminist pedagogy, but drew on many of its principles through the practice of critical information literacy. This practice also helped to identify seminal, foundational works. The "librar*" portion of the search string was removed in order to find materials that addressed feminist pedagogy in the university classroom, rather than simply restricting its practice to academic libraries. The searches were conducted between November 2018 and April 2019, and a second round was run in July 2019, based on participant feedback from the 2019 EBLIP10 conference. The latter search broadly examined feminism in librarianship, rather than narrowing it strictly to feminist pedagogy. Case studies, books, book chapters, literature reviews, research papers, interviews, surveys, and papers based on statistical and qualitative analysis were consulted.

**Literature review**

How can library and information professionals go about practicing feminist pedagogy? Can students be assessed in a feminist manner? The literature revealed several concrete examples of how to do so. The author consulted literature both within and outside of the field of LIS and

included the broader topic of critical information literacy in addition to feminist pedagogy.

### *How to put feminist pedagogy into practice*

#### *Dialogue facilitation*

At its core, practicing feminist pedagogy boils down to being an excellent facilitator of dialogue and group discussion (Accardi, 2013; Couture & Ladenson, 2017; Grimm & Meeks, 2017; Hackney et al., 2018; Lai & Lu, 2009; Maher and Tetreault, 2001; Tewell, 2018; Wallis, 2016). The ideal feminist pedagogue steers the conversation with a gentle touch, asking prompting questions when necessary, to move the dialogue along without implicating oneself too much in it. "Creating opportunities for dialogue and discussion was central to the instructional practice" of many of Tewell's (2018, p. 19) study participants who were practicing critical information literacy. Since feminist pedagogy falls under the umbrella of critical information literacy, much can be gleaned from librarian Eamon Tewell's work interviewing librarians. Those who practice feminist pedagogy are open to different ideas, even those that do not mirror their own, and openly encourage different voices to be heard. Facilitators should aim to "foster a feminist learning space that privileges dialogue, collaboration, experience-based knowledge, and gender-centeredness – all of which resonates with feminist pedagogy" (Lai & Lu, 2009, p. 65). While not librarians, Lai and Lu are professors who taught an undergraduate online course, titled *Images of Women in Western Civilization*. They used it as a case study and examined how employing feminist pedagogy facilitated student asynchronous online discussions (p. 58).

While the term "intersectionality" had yet to be coined, Maher and Tetreault's research dating back to the late 1980s indicates that intersectional feminist pedagogy was already being practiced in some academic institutions. They recorded a discussion in 1987 around white feminist theory, which focuses on "gender as the major issue and [subordinates] race, class, and sexual orientation to the primacy of gender oppression (while ignoring white women's skin privilege on other accounts)" (p. 170). Their research demonstrated that when the majority of a classroom is composed of white students, it enables "racial insulation," which means that gender is discussed in a bubble, and disregards race, class, and sexuality (p. 170). To counteract racial insulation, they observed the successful intersectional feminist facilitation technique of Dr. Gloria Wade-Gayles, who taught *Images of Women in Literature* at Emory University. The class was made up of a mix of black and white, and male and female students. Wade-Gayles noted that students tended to cluster together based on race. During one class, she twice asked students to change where they sat. Maher and Tetreault observed that as a result, white female students who were sitting on the perimeter of the room moved closer to the centre and intermingled with their black classmates (p. 173). The physical space that students occupied influenced the dynamics and discussions that took place in the classroom. "As we compared the classes we observed, we saw that dynamics of position shaped the particular forms that mastery, voice, and authority took in each classroom" (p. 173).

Nearly half of the librarians interviewed by librarian Dr. Annie Downey (2016) "centered their classes around dialogue or discussion, and for many of those, it was the chief device they used to teach critical information literacy concepts" (pp. 91). While Downey's work was framed within the context of critical information literacy, its findings, much like Tewell's, can help inform feminist pedagogy. A good instructor will find ways to encourage shyer participants to join in through various means. This could be through a think-pair-share activity, for example, which is a collaborative learning strategy in which participants are given time to think about a topic or question, are then paired with another student for discussion, and then may share their findings with the larger

group. This technique ensures that individual students are not put on the spot, as it were, and has been adopted by many feminist pedagogy practitioners, such as librarians Wallis (2016) and Couture and Ladenson (2017). These subtle, undercover facilitation strategies will help librarians and professors alike "move discussions towards deeper, richer, and critical directions" (Lai & Lu, 2009, p. 63). Ultimately, creative dialogue facilitation is key to practicing feminist pedagogy in information literacy.

*Feminist search examples*

Perhaps the most common recurring practice was simply using examples in one-shots that are linked in some way, shape, or form to feminism. For example, subject librarians in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields can demonstrate database searches by looking up "women in science" or "gender and the informal economy" or notable women in the field, such as mathematician Ada Lovelace. Librarian Ellen Broidy (2007) explains how Lovelace was used as a search example:

This iconic figure from the first half of the nineteenth century drew the students' attention to the fact that women had been part of the technological revolution from the very beginning. At the same time, Ada's life, work, and untimely death from uterine cancer vividly illustrated the intersecting themes of gender, technology, and the politics of information. (p. 501)

Ladenson (2010) incorporated intersectional feminist examples into her gender studies classes by including active learning techniques to stimulate critical inquiry:

At the beginning of each instruction session, the librarian shows students colorful pictures of a prominent woman in popular culture and/or public life (such as Oprah Winfrey). She also shows students pictures of another politically, socially and/or historically significant woman who is less ubiquitous in contemporary culture

(such as Angela Davis). After briefly identifying each woman and naming some of her significant accomplishments, the librarian asks students to write down at least one question they would like to ask about each woman, and list at least one information source in which they would expect to find the answer. After generating their ideas, the students share their questions and information sources with the class. Next, the librarian lists the information sources on the board, and engages students in further discussion by asking them to identify which ones are primary, and which ones are secondary. (pp. 109-110)

By highlighting the experiences and contributions of women of colour in the classroom, and subverting traditional classroom dynamics, Ladenson demonstrates an appreciation for intersectional feminist pedagogy.

These simple practices enable librarians to surreptitiously incorporate feminist pedagogy into the classroom. Students who are following along will find articles related to women practicing in these heretofore male-dominated professions and perhaps glean a bit of information about a topic they would otherwise not have been exposed to during their studies. A biological literature professor observed by Maher and Tetreault (2001) had students do labs, where they learned that in past scientific tests the behaviours of female fish were not examined. At the time of publication, Maher was a professor of education at Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts, and Tetreault was provost and vice president for academic affairs at Portland State University. Their book, *The Feminist Classroom*, is a seminal work in the field of academic feminist pedagogy. While the students "did not see gender as a central issue of the course" (Maher & Tetreault, 2001, pp. 137), this simple act of feminist pedagogy highlights simply one example of the ultimate undercover feminist. This applies to the LIS classroom, as well. Noble, Austin, Sweeney, McKeever, and Sullivan (2014) developed a course on race,

gender, and sexuality in the information professions. They made "a concerted effort to use scholars of color and women in LIS to draw attention to the ways that lack of representation in the field directly impacts what can be studied, and from whose vantage points and epistemologies" (p. 218). Using feminist search examples is one of the simplest ways to incorporate feminist pedagogy into one's practice, and an effective strategy if subtlety is required.

*Faculty collaboration*

A common difficulty for academic librarians who teach is finding ways to address broader conceptions of information within the constraints of a brief standalone session. Reaching out to faculty before a one-shot and asking for topics or problems the class could work on together can provide several positive outcomes. Downey (2016) argues that "building relationships with the teaching faculty is of the utmost importance to librarians and they are very careful with the relationships they develop" (p. 132). Some librarians in the literature found this to be a helpful way to ensure the students had topic examples that were relevant to their assignments and lead to large gains in authentic student involvement and learning (Couture & Ladenson, 2017; Downey, 2016). Establishing relationships with faculty may lead to trust and open doors to conversations around pedagogical theory and practice.

Some librarians found faculty outreach to be a potential entry point into discussing feminist pedagogy, depending on how receptive they were to librarian topic pitches and how the conversation flowed. For example, Couture and Ladenson (2017) met with faculty and had positive discussions around course objectives, type and number of sources, and the assignment's relation to feminist theory. "Eventually, we decided to not prescribe a set number or type of sources but instead use the session to reinforce and expand on concepts

addressed in earlier in the semester, such as synthesizing information from numerous disciplines" (Couture & Ladenson, 2017, pp. 182-183).

Potential downsides to this could be the faculty member being too prescriptive in deciding the content of the one-shot. This is not a perfect practice, but it can help identify faculty allies, open doors for future collaboration, and aid in practicing feminist pedagogy in future library information sessions.

*Student consultation*

If the librarian is fortunate enough to be embedded in a class, invited to multiple sessions throughout the semester, or solicited to create an assignment and grading rubric, a recommended practice is to involve the students in the creation of the evaluation criteria and/or portions of the syllabus. Accardi (2013) writes:

Not only is feminist pedagogy concerned with subverting patriarchal subject matter, but it also is concerned with the *way* any subject matter is taught. . . . Instead of the teacher serving as the ultimate authority on all knowledge and information, knowledge is collaboratively discussed and created by the students and the teacher together. (p. 25)

This empowers students and gives them agency over their education. Rather than being passive receivers of knowledge (Freire, 1970) students become actively engaged in the creation of their own assessment. A librarian does not need to be embedded in a class to consult students. This could also be as simple as beginning a library workshop by asking what students' goals are for the session, or asking them to name one thing they want to learn that day, and then tailoring the information literacy session to suit their needs accordingly.

Student consultations can also take the form of critiquing one another's work. Librarian Ellen Broidy (2007) taught a semester-long course and

had students send their project proposals to the entire class two days ahead of their meeting. When the class met, the students discussed and dissected the topics and made suggestions for overcoming challenges. This method adhered to the "basic tenets of feminist pedagogy and [Broidy's] desire for a high degree of participation" (p. 499). To the causal student observer, nothing about this practice is blatantly feminist. This technique may therefore help those who wish to incorporate feminist pedagogy in the classroom, but who may not want to make their agenda explicit.

Student consultation is also worth considering for LIS faculty. Many LIS students come to library school with diverse work and academic backgrounds, as well as life experiences and intellectual tools that align with the principles of critical, as well as feminist, pedagogy (Pawley, 2006, p. 165). Faculty, librarian Dr. Christine Pawley argues, can "take another step in this direction by setting aside hierarchical models of curriculum development in which they themselves constitute the main source of expertise and curricular knowledge" (p. 164) by partnering with students on developing the LIS curriculum.

*Meaningful for librarians and information professionals*

A major recurring theme was that almost all librarians, information professionals, and professors who engage in feminist pedagogy find the practice to be extremely meaningful (Accardi, 2013; Couture & Ladenson, 2017; Lai & Lu, 2009; Tewell, 2018). For example, one-shots over time can become rote and repetitive. By continually seeking new material, new feminist examples, and new ways to teach, those who practice feminist pedagogy are keeping the material fresh for themselves. There is also great satisfaction derived from engaging students in feminist debates, watching them delve into feminist literature, enabling conversations and

discussions around feminist topics, and learning how much they took away from the session.

Librarians and information professionals can also exert their feminist agenda outside of the classroom. This method may be particularly helpful for those who have little face-to-face time with their students. It can be as simple as creating a book display tied to feminism, social justice, or other progressive topics. The information professional who, as librarian Baharak Yousefi (2017) puts it, "co-opts and subverts existing structures" with the long-term goal of "progressive change or equitable access in mind" is a classic undercover feminist (p. 101).

Practicing feminist pedagogy is not without its challenges. This portion of the paper will highlight major issues librarians have encountered and how they have counteracted this resistance.

### *Challenges with feminist pedagogy*

*One-shot instruction*

Standalone, one-shot information literacy sessions are the most common form of teaching by academic librarians (Downey, 2016). One survey conducted by Downey looked at librarians from a variety of institutional types and found that 94% of teaching librarians teach one-shots (p. 82). The nature of the one-shot makes meaningful, in-depth feminist pedagogy difficult to put into practice outside of very basic, surface-level examples. Wallis (2016) writes that "librarians using critical and feminist pedagogies are ultimately stunted by the one-shot" (p. 5). Research by Tewell (2018) confirmed, "even the most sophisticated pedagogy is really, really limited in [the one-shot] format" (p. 21). Yet even when presented with these challenges, feminist pedagogy is "still important, still possible, still worth pursuing" (Accardi, 2013, p. 69). Accardi (2013) goes on to explain that:

The marginal status of librarians gives us more freedom to experiment with our pedagogy than regular teaching faculty have, especially if we are not bound by the strictures of the credit-bearing information literacy course. While the one-shot class has its own set of challenges, it also has more flexibility that progressive librarians can take advantage of and subvert for progressive purposes. (p. 69)

While librarians cannot observe the long-term effects of this instruction, they can still covertly introduce feminist concepts into the classroom.

*Faculty and administrative pushback*

Librarians can encounter pushback from faculty or university administration when incorporating overtly feminist examples in their teaching. When librarians reach out to faculty for collaboration and make their feminist agenda clear, this presents a risk. Unfortunately, librarians must be careful in declaring their intention to practice feminist pedagogy, depending on the faculty member or lecturer. At some institutions, there is a power imbalance between the subject librarians and their respective faculty members. As Downey (2016) explains, "librarians often feel indebted to any professor who allows them to teach for their classes and are overly careful to make sure they do not upset them in any way by treading too heavily in their territory, making too many suggestions for content, or making suggestions too strongly" (pp. 149-150). One librarian interviewed by Tewell (2018) highlighted lack of faculty understanding as a major obstacle to putting critical information literacy into practice: "Faculty don't know that librarians actually think about these things and have a pedagogy and theory that drive our work. They think we just show databases and that is the extent of our value. Changing that perception is very hard and often demeaning" (p. 22).

The literature indicates that expanding or building on critical information literacy, including feminist pedagogy, is heavily dependent on library administrative support (Downey, 2016; Maher & Tetreault, 2001). This can help negate what Maher and Tetreault dub "turf issues" (p. 128) that arise when faculty and librarians have different visions for information literacy instruction. Downey explains that library administrators should "lay the groundwork and strive to make information literacy more of a priority at the institutional level" (pp. 149-150).

*Subject matter*

Certain courses lend themselves more easily to feminist pedagogy. Obvious examples include feminist theory and feminist literature classes, as the students are already primed. Other courses, particularly those in STEM fields, may present larger challenges in finding natural ways to incorporate this. Nevertheless, librarians can become creative in how they choose to include feminist examples in their work. As previously mentioned, Maher and Tetrault (2011) observed a professor teach a course on biological literature. The professor had students do labs, where they learned that past scientific tests did not examine the behaviours of female fish – only male. The professor also asked students to do a "free-write" on women in science. The professor "seemed to be saying simply that if women – and their differences – were included in scientific thinking and practice, then science would be expanded and improved" (p. 138). Proof that this subtle tactic was yet another example of undercover feminism, Maher and Tetreault found that students viewed the course pragmatically and "did not see gender as a central issue of the course" (p. 137). And yet when Maher and Tetreault talked to each student individually, they shared that they found the class empowering.

*Student resistance*

Feminist pedagogy has as one of its main tenets to hold students' individual experiences as equally valid as the academic information discussed in the class. How students apply their

own lived experiences as a means of understanding and interacting with the literature is a major first step towards the students engaging with the literature in a feminist manner. In many instances, the instructor takes a back seat to these discussions, and merely acts as a guiding light. Unfortunately, there can be student resistance to this method of instruction. As hooks (1994) notes, "this type of learning process is very hard; it's painful and troubling" (p. 153). Some students perceive it as laziness on the instructor's part or are conditioned to perceive their classmates' life experiences as being of lesser import than the literature under review.

About one-third of the librarians interviewed by Downey in 2016 described instances where students were resistant to critical information literacy methods (p. 99). Some students expect only to be filled with knowledge, as outlined by Freire's (1970) seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Others expect to be taught practical skills "that they could apply on the job, leaving theory by the wayside" (Noble et al., 2014, p. 216).

One strategy, developed by Couture and Ladenson (2017), was to "ease students into this uncomfortable territory by demystifying the session" (p. 187). They recommend beginning the session by explaining one's approach and outlining the benefits, and then moving on engaging the students in a group conversation on how "the process of raising critical questions can lead you to different directions that may create a more focused area of inquiry" (p. 187). Clearly sharing one's agenda is a solid technique if it is available to the librarian. However, this method is only available to those who do not fear potential repercussions.

*Authority*

One of the disadvantages to being either a tenure-track librarian or a precariously employed contract librarian is that one may find oneself in a vulnerable place, with a desire not to

"rock the boat." While feminism, if not the theory and practice then the word itself, has increasingly become more mainstream in popular culture, there may be hesitation amongst librarians to openly declare their intentions or agenda until they have obtained tenure or a permanent position. As one librarian interviewed by Tewell (2018) explained: "It is not always clear what their attitudes/approach to pedagogy are and as a young, tenure-track librarian I often feel like I need to 'play it safe'" (p. 22).

Some early career, tenure-track, or contract librarians may feel conflicted when tackling the contradictory emotions of wanting to be seen as an expert in the field, and yet simultaneously wishing to create an open and anti-hierarchical atmosphere in the classroom. How can librarians balance these seemingly opposed issues? Noble et al. (2014) argue that while dialogue facilitation places the librarian in a position of authority, it prevents the discussion from deteriorating and ensures students deeply engage with the material (p. 215). Maher and Tetreault recommend illuminating the "constantly shifting context of professional authority" by making one's authority "positional, rather than externally imposed, by grounding it in personal experience, knowledge, and situation" (p. 165). Gender also plays an important role in how authority is perceived. Research has shown that female professors receive poorer student evaluations than their male counterparts (Peterson, Biederman, Andersen, Ditonto, & Roe, 2019). Maher and Tetreault's (2001) found that that female professors practicing feminist pedagogy will deliberately maintain authoritative presences, particularly in large classrooms, to counteract this unconscious bias (p. 139).

Tenured librarians, or those who have secured a permanent position within their institution, should use their authority to critically engage, ask difficult questions, and use their influence for good. By not doing so, librarian Jennifer Vinopal (2016) argues these librarians are not

staying neutral – rather, they are "reinforcing systems of *domination* and *oppression* that need, instead, to be dismantled." Intersectional feminism provides librarians with both a theory and a practice for addressing oppression.

*Assessment*

In seeking to answer the question "Can students be assessed in a feminist manner?" the author uncovered several successful methods in the literature. It should be noted that many in the profession struggle to "meaningfully examine learning in feminist classrooms while not reinforcing power structures inherent within assessment mechanisms" (Couture & Ladenson, 2017, p. 186). However, the literature points towards several ways in which librarians can assess their students – and themselves – in a feminist manner, which is to say in a way that is "learner-centered and diverse and validates differing perspectives and voices (Accardi, 2013, p. 112).

Librarian Lauren Wallis (2016) had students work in pairs on shared Google Docs, where they had to create article maps. This enabled Wallis, from her podium, to track their work in real-time and allowed her to identify students who were struggling and needed some additional help, which she provided by simply checking in during the activity. Likewise, when she noticed groups making interesting observations, she could encourage students to share their ideas during the class discussion. In both cases, the technology – and the assessment it enabled – supported the session's emphasis on dialogue between students and teacher. She was later able to review their work after class and email comments to the students. This, Wallis states, allowed her to "engage in feminist assessment that thwarts the notion that there is only one answer or one way of knowing and experiencing the world" (p. 4). Wallis confirmed that observationally her assessment interventions were successful, as the students were "more willing to question the established

system of scholarly conversation than students in a traditional one-shot class" (p. 5).

A strong example for both practicing and assessing the effectiveness of feminist pedagogy is the one-minute essay (Couture & Ladenson, 2017). This technique is either used mid-session or at the end of a session to learn how much the students have taken away from the instruction. It asks the student to take a minute and write down what they learned and what is still unclear. This is a particularly useful tool during one-shots, given the paucity of valuable feedback one tends to receive, and can be tailored to align with instructor's learning objectives (pp. 186-87). The one-minute essay also provides a moment of self-reflection for the students, and this reflective practice aims to give students agency in the learning process, which is another essential facet of feminist pedagogy.

Self-assessment for the instructor is just as important as assessing students' learning. Librarian Dory Cochran (2016) recommends practicing our own self-assessment following the class and reflect on student reactions to the lesson. Cochran provides possible questions for the librarian to consider: How much did I talk in comparison to students? When should I have talked more or less in order to draw out students' ideas? What types of perspectives or viewpoints did students discuss? What was everyone's participation level like? What might have influenced some to participate less and others more? (p. 113).

Librarians teaching in semester-long LIS programs could practice feminist pedagogy in one of the following ways: including students in the development of their assessment; featuring feminist LIS content on the syllabus; and using any of the assessment methods included in this paper. Work by librarians Dr. Bharat Mehra, Hope A. Olson, and Suzana Ahmad (2011) has shown that the top five ways to include diversity in courses is through course readings, class discussion, assignment topics, and case studies. Pawley (2006) argues that critical

information literacy in the LIS classroom should not simply be restricted to issues-based courses. Foundational courses in LIS, as well as research methods courses, can also provide opportunities for this critical reflection (p. 164). Librarians offering credit-based workshops, or workshops that appear on a student's co-curricular record, could work alongside the credit-issuing body to assess the student throughout their time at their institution. This would allow the LIS profession to track the long-term benefits of feminist pedagogy.

By introducing feminist pedagogical practices in the LIS classroom, and either covertly or overtly sharing one's agenda with the students, librarians help to shape classroom conversations. These conversations are the first step towards encouraging students, future LIS professionals, to critically examine LIS literature, to enact positive change in the field by testing out feminist pedagogical approaches, and perhaps later to evaluate said approaches, with the eventual hope of later producing evidence based LIS literature. Currently the LIS field is lacking vis-à-vis publications that examine intersectional identities. A survey of LIS journals published from 1975 to 2013, conducted by information professionals Hackney et al. (2018), shows that less than 1% of the literature "is concerned with questions of identity, and of that fraction, the majority does not consider intersectional identities or attempt praxis in significant ways" (p. 29). It is imperative that these practices be employed in a timely manner. As Jaeger, Subramaniam, Jones, and Bertot (2011) warn, "unless meaningful action occurs soon, LIS as a profession and libraries as a societal institution risk becoming exclusive rather than inclusive" (p. 177).

## Conclusion

Feminist pedagogy is an important, useful, and effective pedagogical tool in higher education. It can be achieved in myriad ways: shrewd class facilitation; building relationships with faculty and lecturers to discuss pedagogical practices;

consulting students on class content, syllabus creation, and evaluation criteria; and using search examples that highlight the work of individuals who identify as women. These methods can be deployed surreptitiously or overtly and ensure a meaningful and empowering experience for students and information professionals alike.

While LIS literature on feminist pedagogy emerged only a decade ago, this paper demonstrates that through creative use of free technology and one-minute essays and by practicing self-assessment, librarians and information professionals can assess their pedagogical practices in a feminist manner and contribute to future literature on the topic. The major challenge librarians are continually up against is the restrictive nature of the standalone, one-shot information literacy session, since tracking the long-term effects of feminist pedagogy on its learners is difficult. However, this also provides librarians with more flexibility than instructors and grants us the freedom to test out different pedagogical practices.

As a profession, librarians have a role to play in enacting social change, fostering active student engagement, and promoting critical thinking skills. Through feminist pedagogy, librarians subvert traditional classroom dynamics, making us undercover feminists. This paper provides librarians with examples to experiment with feminist pedagogy and feminist assessment in the classroom, with the hope that it will lead to more evidence based literature in the near future.

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