Examining Feminist Pedagogy from the Perspective of Transformative Learning: Do Race and Gender Matter in Feminist Classrooms?

Mitsunori Misawa [1]; Juanita Johnson-Bailey [2]
[1] University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, USA
[2] University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA

Abstract

Although feminist pedagogy has been widely used as a teaching approach in classrooms in higher education to enhance diversity, issues of race and gender are often areas of contestations for non-White faculty. The purpose of this study was to explore how non-White professors, a Black woman tenured full professor and a gay Asian male pre-tenured professor, co-created a feminist classroom and how they negotiated power in that classroom environment. The research questions that guided this study were: 1) what does a feminist classroom look like in higher education; 2) how does the intersection of race and gender influence feminist pedagogy; and 3) what strategies do adult educators and practitioners use to deal with disoriented dilemmas? This research progressed into a longitudinal study, focusing on how the faculty members' praxes grew from critical classroom incidents that the professors believed directly related the negative reactions from students to their positionalities as a Black woman and an Asian man. Three themes emerged from the data: a) Confrontation, b) Resistance, and c) Hostility. Each of these themes are defined and presented through direct quotes from our teaching logs and students' reflections. Discussion and implications for practice are also provided regarding how race and gender matter in feminist classrooms. The concluding section describes how the two faculty members implemented reflective practices in higher education to create feminist classrooms.

Keywords: Feminist pedagogy; gender; higher education; race.

Introduction and background of the study

Feminist pedagogy has been widely used by many practitioners in education and is understood by its users to create safer and more inclusive learning environments for their students. Feminist scholars and academics who center women's perspectives in their practices have strived to develop safer and more inclusive educational settings for learners where a more democratic pedagogy is practiced using feminist pedagogy. A broad spectrum of feminist literature embraces the notion that the ideal classroom is a refuge for all students and is a site of caring; but these concepts of safety and caring are questioned by women and faculty of color (Delano-Oriaran & Parks, 2015; hooks, 1989; Sue et al., 2011). The authors of this article, maintain that the classroom is rarely a safe space for People of Color, as students or teachers, because the classroom is merely a microcosm of our larger society and is therefore representative of the hierarchical systems that order the nonacademic world. Furthermore, we believe that when the *other* is the teacher, the class environment can become a *contested terrain* (Delano-Oriaran & Parks, 2015; Johnson-Bailey, 1998; Sue et al., 2011; Vargas, 1998) and a battlefield, where clashes can occur between the teacher and the students.

The purpose of this study was to explore how non-White professors, a Black woman tenured professor and a gay Asian male pre-tenured professor, co-created a feminist classroom and how they negotiated their power in that classroom environment. Initially the faculty members examined a three-hour one-semester course. The guiding research questions were: 1) what does a feminist classroom look like in higher education; 2) how does the intersection of race and gender influence feminist pedagogy; and 3) what strategies can adult educators and practitioners use to deal with disoriented dilemmas in a feminist classroom in higher education?

At this point in our research, over a decade later, we are both tenured professors. In the continuation of this study, we remain focused on our experiences as perceived academic outsiders. From the original study, we concluded that our students' negative and hostile interactions with us were directly related to our positionalities as a Black woman and an Asian man. Currently, this ongoing longitudinal study is grounded and informed by our initial efforts where we examined critical incidents that occurred in the 2007 class and that centered on the students' and faculty members' collective disorienting dilemmas. Those early experiences for us as faculty of color, led to transformative learning, which became the theoretical framework of this work from the collective disorienting dilemmas to continuous transformations in teaching through critical reflection and praxis (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006; Mezirow, 2018; Taylor, 2000). As we have continued our critical reflections that centered on our classroom experiences, we have developed coping mechanisms, teaching strategies, and an understanding of our students' reactions.

This article explores foundational literature on feminist pedagogy, briefly discusses the methods used, and highlights the three themes that emerged in the original study. Lastly, as feminist pedagogues, we reflect on what has been gleaned from our decades-plus critical reflections.

Foundational literature

Feminist pedagogy has revolutionized the academy and has powerfully informed and transformed teaching and learning as it has been implemented in higher education where diversity and multiculturalism are valued and encouraged. Some strands of feminist pedagogy bear a strong relationship to both critical pedagogy and multicultural education literature and yet others have no relationship (Tisdell, 1998). Most scholars describe feminist pedagogy as a viable framework through which to create and foster learning environments that center the voices and experiences of women and other marginalized learners (Maher & Tetreault, 2001; Misawa, 2018, 2019).

Feminist pedagogy as defined by Maher and Tetreault (2001) is the art and science of teaching using women-centered and feminist approaches that aim "to encourage the 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 materials" (pp. 3-4). Feminism is both a social justice movement as well as a framework through which to understand women's experiences in male-dominated societies and their institutions. As a movement toward promoting equity for women, feminism has served as one of the most effective and liberatory social movements in the Western society (Freedman, 2006). Feminist pedagogy flows directly from feminism and facilitates students and teachers' understanding of how knowledge and viewpoints can be gendered and multifocal instead of uniform. Practicing feminist pedagogy is valued in contemporary postsecondary education, especially when the institution provides feminist components and women-centered curriculum; but traditional ways of operating feminist pedagogy can be complicated by the positionality of instructors and learners (Johnson-Bailey & Lee, 2005). Feminist pedagogy enables educators to enhance and promote an understanding of social justice from a gender-aware standpoint; however, historically feminist pedagogy has routinely focused on White heterosexual women's perspectives. Research shows that it may be the case that people who are not White heterosexual women are more readily questioned about their authority and knowledge when operating as feminist educators (Belenky et al., 1986; Maher & Tetreault, 2001; Tuitt et al., 2009). Additionally, they are not afforded the trust that is customarily bestowed on White professors, and this makes the positive holistic teaching experience described by Brookfield (2015) elusive for the *other* who teaches.

This *otherness*, as de Beauvoir (1968) stated, is defined against the norm of maleness and in today's context is additionally extrapolated and defined in contrast to the normalcy of whiteness and maleness. Baker and Copp (1997) state the dilemma more succinctly: "Faculty members who violate the White male, able-bodied stereotype must also experience students' contradictory expectations regarding gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and physical abilities" (p. 42). According to Baker and Copp (1997), students see professors who do not fit the accepted stereotype as inferior and judge professors with

different positionalities as *liabilities*. In extending this line of reasoning, then such students would also be less accepting of what such "other" faculty members could offer.

Feminist pedagogy also seeks to "create learning environments where learners can critique social conditions and understand how their gender, race, sexuality, or class affects their personal, work, and social lives" (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 218). By addressing the power issues that are inherent in the classroom, feminist pedagogy also has asked academicians to examine their individual practices, curriculum, and perspectives for subjugation by gender, race, and class (Johnson-Bailey & Lee, 2005; Johnson-Bailey & Misawa, 2017; Tisdell, 1998). However, there is no one-size-fits-all feminist pedagogy, and the combination of feminist pedagogy and teachers of color can make for a *dangerous liaison* (Johnson-Bailey & Lee, 2005).

As an essential method of teaching, feminist pedagogy has encouraged teaching practices that empower students because it asks teachers to develop styles that are nonauthoritative and nurturing. In other words, some of the characteristics of feminist pedagogy are: participatory learning, validation of personal experience, encouragement of social understanding and activism, development of critical thinking, open mindedness, and an ethic of care (Diller, 2018; Hoffmann & Stake, 1998).

Methods

Professors usually share their educational narratives to understand what is going on in their own teaching practice (McNiff, 2017). Oftentimes, they use their narratives as a way to explore their own journeys as educators (Clandini & Rosiek, 2007; Ramdeholl & Jones, 2022). As a gay Asian male tenured associate professor and a Black woman tenured full professor, we, the authors, have also been discussing our pedagogical practices and in particular the pedagogy we used in a class that we taught in the Spring Semester of 2007, our first joint teaching experience, a graduate course on feminist pedagogy that we continued to teach together for several consecutive years. The critical reflections on our teaching collaborations began as a way to manage the disorienting dilemmas (Cranton & Taylor, 2011; Mezirow, 2018), that occurred in those early co-taught classes. At the time, we never imagined it as the beginning of what would become our transformational learning experiences or a fifteen-year longitudinal examination of the teaching experiences of faculty of color in predominantly White classroom at PWIs.

Since 2011, we have taught separately as professors at two different predominantly White research institutions. Yet, we still continue to discuss how our positionalities influence our own teaching practices and how it all began in a feminist pedagogy class, an environment where we naively expected to find students who were invested in social justice and who were practitioners of its tenets. As we are in the same academic discipline, on occasion we teach similar graduate classes, this study is based on our joint teaching experiences in a graduate level Feminist Pedagogy class and on our subsequent separate teaching experiences at different research universities at two PWIs in the Southern United States.

The context of the original study was a feminist pedagogy course that was offered as an elective course for graduate students. We chose to research this feminist pedagogy course in 2007 because we thought this particular course was difficult and challenging in terms of instructor-student interactions where we witnessed and experienced racism, sexism, and the intersection of racism and sexism. The course was cross-listed for adult education and Women's Studies majors. So, any graduate student who was interested in teaching or in women's studies could take it. However, adult education students typically took the course because they were interested in understanding different ways of teaching. The class composition was a bit unique: two non-White co-instructors and 15 women students. Mitsu, the gay Asian pre-tenured professor, was the only male in the class. The class was racially diverse: two South Korean women students, four Black woman students, and nine White woman students. There was a mix adult education and women's studies majors.

In order for us to recapture our own teaching experiences of this the 2007 feminist pedagogy class, a retrospective narrative approach was implemented. A retrospective narrative approach is widely used to examine critical incidents, phenomena, and cultures in social sciences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) and is usually told from the point of view of a character looking back on past events to clearly demonstrate how the events led to personal growth and some degree of transformation. Multiple sources were used to construct, re-construct, and co-construct stories (Johnson-Bailey, 2001). We used our personal and teaching journals and notes from our various conversations as the data for the original study.

In our teaching journals, we kept our thoughts on our teaching experiences in class and on our teaching plans outside of the class. We followed Brookfield's (2017) reflective strategy, *teaching logs,* to capture what we thought was important in our teaching and planning processes each week. We soon realized that this feminist pedagogy class was not the idealized feminist pedagogy of our dreams. We tried to capture the moments in the particular week where we felt most connected or disconnected in class. Also, we attempted to address the incidents or events that were surprising or distressing to us during our teaching and planning processes. Since we began this research after the class had ended, we decided to seek information from students who were in the 2007 course and did a purposeful sample (Patton, 2014) and used a nine-question survey consisting of open-ended questions (Patton, 2014). Our criteria included seeking students with different positionalities, students who had graduated from the institution and students who were perceived as class leaders. We asked the students to provide us with their own reflections on the class and their thoughts on their own experiences.

The constant comparative method as presented by (Maykut & Morehouse, 2000) was used to analyze the data. As researchers, we read the data generated from our former students to discover areas of agreement and disagreement in an effort to identify possible themes. Next, we reviewed our teaching logs and critically reflected on the incidents from the class that we found disorienting, recounting how we felt in the moment. As a final step, we placed the data sets, the recollections from the students and the teaching logs, in dialogue to determine main themes.

Findings: A classroom experience and a longitudinal pedagogical study

The findings are presented in two parts. The first section is about the initial study, where two professors, a gay Asian man and a Black woman, explored their first collaborative teaching experience. They taught a graduate feminist pedagogy class that was cross-listed between Women's Studies and Adult Education. The second set of findings came the critical reflections and dialogues that continued over time between the two faculty members and from their subsequent teaching experiences.

The 2007 feminist pedagogy class

In the past we have each had difficult teaching experiences in our predominantly White university environments --- where we were called names such as an angry Black Woman, a foreigner, and biased teachers. As a result, we would describe ourselves as battle-scared and saw the 2007 course as a marker in our teaching journey that led to epiphanies (Denzin, 1989). Although we long for teaching situations like the ones that Brookfield (2017) describes in which the teacher facilitates learning processes and the respect seems bidirectional, we enter our classrooms with an embarrassing amount of trepidation. That means, there was no generic or ideal teaching situation for us. So, we needed to find a way to survive in our teaching, and we arrived at feminist pedagogy where there is inclusivity and complexity of the themes of knowledge, mastery, voice, positionality, and authority (Maher &Tetreault, 2000).

The struggle for academic place and airspace is fraught with unique challenges when people of color in predominantly White environments teach about difference including diversity, equity, and inclusion (Isaac-Savage & Merriweather, 2021; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998; Romney, Tatum, & Jones, 1992; Williams, Dunlap, & McCandies, 1999). Commonly, an inordinate amount of stress and

student resistance occurs in this intense setting (Romney, Tatum, & Jones, 1992). According to Williams, Dunlap, and McCandies (1999), student resistance, in the form of talking back, hostile nonverbal behavior, inappropriate chatting, and rigid body language, can be a means of disrupting and silencing uncomfortable and difficult dialogue. It is also a way to challenge or interrupt the voice of the teacher, thereby making the classroom an un-safe, risky, and stressful place for the teacher who is the *other*. When the *other* is in charge of such an educational setting, they frequently encounter such situations compared with racial and gender majorities.

It was our finding that three types of incidents dominated the class interactions: Confrontation, Resistance, and Hostility. Subsequently, each of these themes are defined and presented through direct quotes from our teaching logs and students' reflections.

Confrontation

The first theme is "Confrontation," an argumentative situation between instructors and students. As reported in the literature, teachers of color received more direct challenges to their knowledge despite their academic rank, gender, or personal teaching style (Griffin et al., 2011; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008). In this study, confrontation was manifested in different ways in the classroom. In these incidences of confrontation, the learning environment was unsettled: bullying occurred, and students were dismissive of their professors and of other student voices. The expected power dynamics, where professors facilitated the dialogue were disrupted. This theme is important because it demonstrates how a student could be an agent who changes the classroom atmosphere from a positive nurturing environment to a negative environment. Mitsu recalled in this journal what he described as a painful confrontation from a White female student, Wendy:

> When I was talking (in class) about how each person's sociocultural identities such as race, gender, and sexual orientation influenced a specific context of the southern community, and I pointed out that it was important for us to understand how positionality shifts in a different social context, one of the White woman students suddenly stopped me and said, "You are a man. And you are not from here. So, you do not understand what feminism means and how women were treated."

From our critical reflections and from Mitsu's perspective, Wendy's comments revealed that she did not know what feminism meant because a feminist perspective should empower people to examine how positionality would be influenced when we interact with other people. She was rejecting this feminist pedagogical principle by insisting that she alone as a White woman understood feminism and that an Asian male instructor certainly did not understand and could not and maybe should not disseminate information on feminism. It did not matter to her that the Asian male professor had studied feminism, obtained a Ph.D., taught women's studies courses, and demonstrated a perspective that was informed by a woman-centered viewpoint.

Juanita also recalled a similar incident with Wendy where she was openly confrontational:

> She always questioned the readings, remarking that one reading in particular seemed racist and alleged that it was indicting and attacking White women students. She confronted us and couldn't believe that we would "dare" to select such an offensive journal article for the curriculum. When she was told that the reading was written by a White woman, she accused us, the professors of being duplicitous, and maintained her disbelief. She rejected our assertions. However, it was revealed in later discussions that she refused to check on the race of the journal article author.

The incidents of confrontation were also obvious to the students who were contacted to participate in this study. Without prompting, a White woman working-class student, Janie, who was also a graduate teaching assistant while she was in this class, recalled one tense class session where several of the White women students became angry when the faculty were trying to address issues from their feminist perspectives: She wrote:

> I remember both Juanita and Mitsu were very open about their identities and experiences; however, it seemed that some of the White women students tended to use this as a way to elicit emotion work from them, particularly Juanita; although I remember this also being true

> of Mitsu when we discussed sexualities. It seemed not only strange (feminist classrooms aren't therapy sessions) but also when Juanita would push back against this labor, students would act frustrated and angry. I remember some White women students even leaving in the middle of class. The semester seemed like an example of questioning the feminist classroom as a safe space and for whom.

The professors' critical reflections also interpreted the White students' actions as demonstrating the overarching belief that the space of feminism, especially in the feminist classroom, was theirs and subsequently their actions flowed from their sense of ownership and entitlement. Furthermore, the agitated students felt it permissible to question and challenge their professors' knowledge, expertise, and authority because they viewed the professors as 'others' and as interlopers. The resulting confrontations were therefore solicited by the professors' differences -- — Juanita's and Mitsu's races (Black and Asian), and Mitsu's gender (male), and in part his nationality (Japanese).

Resistance

The second theme from the classroom study was "resistance," meaning that students refused to accept or comply with the learning process and materials in class. Issues of resistance were tangible in the classrooms. There were instances when the students refused to respond to the readings or to direct questions posed by the instructors. On other occasions, some of the students would resist the indisputable historical content being covered. Mitsu remembers his interaction `with Karen, another White student, when he was addressing the chronology of the feminist movements:

> …she raised her hand and started saying, "I am a Southern woman. I have been oppressed in a patriarchal society. I know all about feminist movements. I do not want you (a man) to tell me about the history of the feminist movement." I was shocked because …. she used her gender identity to resist what I was delivering to the class. Basically, she told me to shut up because I was a man…

Similarly, Juanita had a situation with the same student and wrote in her critical reflection that she shared with Mitsu:

> In addition to the confrontation, the White woman student explicitly resisted and refused to understand our perspectives on the class discussion topics and reading materials and our delivery methods in class…. This student did not want to hear non-White scholars' life stories or perspectives that we offered as pertinent to feminist pedagogy.

One student, Jean, a Black woman graduate student in her early thirties, who was researching the experiences of the first-generation working-class women at PWIs, recalled how the course momentum was impeded because of the resistance from some White woman students:

> Since the purpose of this course was to examine and explore feminist pedagogical practices, I was somewhat surprised that my peers were unwilling to share their ideas and at times expected to attend class to simply listen to other course members participate. They sat in class in utter silence.

Staci, one of the Women's Studies certificate students, a White woman who is now a professor at a major Southern research university, also remembered how resistance from some of her peers, other White woman students, perplexed her:

> There seemed to be moments of resistance directed toward Juanita and Mitsu in particular. My experience in this class and my first-semester teaching in the women's studies department led me to do a qualitative project on student resistance in the classroom. I was perplexed at the ways people would refuse to "trust" readings or experiences at times that you don't see in other classes…. It was emotionally taxing at times. There was a good deal of resistance followed by emotional outbursts from White women (tears in particular) as though rather than understanding oppression and the acknowledgement of privilege as an ongoing process they wanted to "be forgiven" and felt guilty. The anecdotal stories of students "pulling themselves up by their bootstraps" were really isolating and infuriating. I often left class feeling

> emotionally worn out but [and] not able to really process one particular reason why. I will never forget that we read a poem on white guilt and women of color wanting a space for oneself [themselves]. Many of the White women were really upset about this.

Resistance in learning environments can be problematic for both instructors and learners because certain materials have to be covered within a designated time per semester. Unwillingness to master the class contents due to the co-instructors' positionalities is not acceptable in any educational settings, especially one where instructors and learners should feel free and open to exchange ideas. Yet, this was not the case for the 2007 feminist pedagogy. The class regrettably became a site for unproductive tensions rather than for learning and knowledge exchange.

Hostility

The third finding from the classroom study was "hostility." Some of the students, a group of three women, contributed significantly to the unfriendly, oppressive, unsafe, and hostile environments. Both faculty members remembered one incident where a Black woman student felt that she could not share her own feelings and opinions because she felt that a certain group of White women students had created an environment where the voices of women of color were easily dismissed or misunderstood. We offer an example of the hostility from one of the White women students:

> During class breaks, one student would send the instructors emails to express her opposition to what was happening in the class. Although this student was very vocal about responding to content and answering questions in class, she would not openly share her opinions or opposition to what others had said.

Another Black woman student, Allison, who was in her third year as a student instructor remembered how difficult it was for her to be in the class when the discussion topic was about white privilege:

> When we covered white privilege, I already knew it would be a silent day in class because many of my peers were unwilling and/or unable to think critically about their individual and societal privilege based solely on the color of their skin, which to some degree is understandable. However, what caught me by surprise is the way in which some of my peers chose to disengage. Whenever I teach a course that interrogates race, I find it is absolutely necessary to also engage on white privilege. Part of dealing with racism as a form of oppression means we must also engage the dominant group's privilege as well. One would think that given our emphasis on pedagogy, it would be easier for our professors (Juanita and Mitsu) to facilitate an open dialogue regarding white privilege, but this was not the case. I expected minimal conversation, but what occurred was complete shutdown.

A White woman, Elise, who was a graduate student in Women's Studies also remembered the classroom environment where students were behaving in a hostile manner:

> There was definitely hostility among classmates. The class included Women's Studies students and students from Higher Ed as a cross-listed course. The higher Ed students numerically dominated the class and often either: (a) refused to acknowledge systems of oppression existed or (b) exuded white guilt stories (I really loathed that strange behavior). Both actions diverted the conversation away from discussing the tangible questions for the class of how to practice feminism in the classroom…. I specifically remember students refusing to accept particular readings from the course and experiences. This specifically happened with the Johnson-Bailey and Lee's piece, Where's Our Authority in the Classroom? Which was strangely ironic.

The literature makes clear that students react to the messenger as well as to the message (Chepyator-Thomson, 2000; Johnson-Bailey & Lee, 2005).

Sharing critical reflections led to transformational learning and shaped teaching philosophies

Since that eventful class in the Spring of 2007, we, the Asian man and Black woman, continued to teach together for two more semesters and then later taught separately at different universities. More importantly, we always discussed our teaching successes and dilemmas and

assessed how our positionalities may have affected their practices. Over fifteen years, from 2007 to 2023, we were transformed in our educational practices by difficult teaching experiences, recounting that we consequently grew as instructors, developed strategies, created new curricular exercises, and most importantly continued to find fulfillment in teaching. The primary results from our work together on developing and honing our feminist pedagogies have been centering on transformational learning as our frame and constructing teaching philosophies that undergird and drive our praxes.

Transformative learning as personal frame and practice

As the instructors in this study have progressed in their teaching and research, Juanita and Mitsu have developed and refined their teaching philosophies that are informed by the theoretical frames that they use in their research. Through their conversations and from their practices, Juanita and Mitsu feel that their transformative learning experiences have almost been a continuum of Mezirow's phases (2018), progressing from the *disorienting dilemmas* that occurred in their classroom, to engaging in *self-examination*, making *critical assessment*s of the incidents, and then *recognizing their shared transformative experiences with other group members.* Individually, the instructors explored how their teaching dilemmas shaped *their new roles* as informed instructors and then successively *planned a course of action* based on their *new acquired knowledge and skills*. Since 2007 Mitsu and Juanita *tried out their new roles*, *building confidence* and *integrating new assumptions based on their new perspectives* and using their informed perspectives to construct a classroom that deploys tools that ground their social-justice-driven praxes and encourage student participation, voice, and empowerment. As feminist pedagogues, they endeavored to create educational settings conducive to transformation (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006).

Teaching philosophies

The corollary of their collaboration and critical assessment of their feminist pedagogical practices are teaching philosophies that were honed across fifteen years. Juanita's teaching philosophy, which she now applies in her feminist pedagogy class and in her diversity and equity class, has been helping elucidate its grounding and reveal those connections:

> Implicit in my teaching, which is rooted in social justice, is a critique of Western rationality, androcentric theories, and structured inequalities. My practice is informed by Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson- Billings & Tate, 1995; Outlaw, 1983; Wing, 1997) and Black Feminist Thought. I teach within a political framework that attends to and encourages the following: 1) a caring and safe environment, 2) consciousness raising, and 3) activism. My approach has evolved from my personal experiences as a military brat, as a good Catholic girl growing up in the South during the 1950s, and as a non-traditional adult student in a higher education setting. I have been in positions of enfranchisement and disenfranchisement and in positions of privilege and under privilege. Each circumstance continues to shape what I bring to the classroom and to my students. There are a few unexplored spaces in my classroom. Those who venture in will find acceptance, openness, and an atmosphere of constructive and energetic discourse. I will do my best to teach my students and they have never failed to teach me.

Similarly, Mitsu developed his teaching philosophy, which continues to evolve throughout his academic and professional career. He understands that social power is not distributed equally among people and that he is a minority person in various social contexts including classrooms because of his race and sexual orientation. He strives to create a safer and more inclusive learning environment for his adult learners. Physical and psychological safety are important parts of his teaching. In order for him to create such learning environments, he practices Queer-Crit teaching strategies that are rooted in critical and social justice paradigms focusing on establishing an inclusive and respectful learning environment where learners are co-creators of knowledge with their instructor and their lived experiences are respected (Misawa, 2010). The Queer-Crit teaching strategies came out from Critical Race Theory and focus on the intersectionality of race and sexual orientation and the positionality of multiple-selves (Misawa, 2022). Intersectionality and positionality are two key concepts in

the Queer-Crit teaching strategies. When discussing intersectionality and positionality, power-dynamics are naturally discussed. Kumashiro (2001) reminds us that queer people of color are doubly oppressed in society because race and sexual orientation, and race and sexual orientation can be a double-edged sword depending on social, cultural, and educational contexts. So, Mitsu is aware of different layers of power dynamics based on positionalities, and he believes that educators need to be aware of multiple positional power relations in an educational context.

Discussion

The themes from the initial study presented some of the main experiences that happened in one semester in a feminist pedagogy class and revealed that power dynamics are pivotal in practicing feminist pedagogy. Feminist pedagogy is supposed to be centered around social justice. That means, a feminist classroom governed by feminist pedagogy should not converge into confrontation, resistance, or hostility. However, these negative elements were generated throughout the class primarily because of the instructors' positionalities and intersections of their identities and that of some of the students. Although the ideal of the feminist classroom as an open and safe space is clearly stated in the literature (Brookfield, 2017), that concept proved to be the ideal and was unrealistic in the environment of the 2007 feminist pedagogy class examined. Unfortunately, the co-instructors of color were perceived as the "others" who were not the knowledge authorities.

From the findings of the study, it was noted that positionality greatly influences the practice of feminist pedagogy. Because of that, it is important for both instructors and learners to be able to unpack their privileges and examine the relational aspects of their sociocultural identities in a classroom (Closson, Bowman, & Merriweather, 2014; Delano-Oriaran & Parks, 2015; Sue et al., 2011) in order to operationalize feminist pedagogy. The co-instructors, the Asian man and the Black woman, tried to share their life stories about feminism and endeavored to create a feminist classroom environment for the predominately White women students. Yet, their respective positionalities as co-instructors of color were regarded both as a non-White perspective and a non-woman perspective for the Asian man by several White women students who discounted and dismissed some of the key teachings and refused to see the teachers as having the ability to contribute to knowledge production.

Over time and by continuing to critically reflect on their classroom experiences, the two faculty members have concluded that it is challenging to create caring-centered and nurturing environments in contemporary higher education due to academic, political, and social climates that dismiss and devalue positionality (Misawa, 2010; Ramdeholl & Jones, 2022). The dailiness of these faculty members feminist practices, the cognizance of their social positions, and the perceptions of them have forced the professors to grapple with biases --- against nonnative English speakers, against people of color, and stereotypes that compound what traditional feminist pedagogues describe as the dilemmas of the feminist classroom. However, the critical reflection and deep revelatory dialogue that stemmed from fifteen years forced the two professors to engage in self-examination and mutual exploration. As a consequence, they grew and transformed and embraced transformational learning as the theoretical frame for their teaching. More importantly, the dyad found that their work led them to identify and hold on to the love of and joy of teaching that led them in the professoriate.

In direct response to critical reflection on their praxes, the two faculty have developed strategies and ways of facilitating our classes, setting the following as essential ways proceed: 1) to share authority and decision making with our co-learners; 2) to candidly discuss how power dynamics might affect the topics being discussed; 3) to honor the experience and perspectives of the learners; and 4) to analyze effects of background and status on social life (Misawa, 2019). However, their most important intent in the practice of feminist pedagogy is to empower student co-learners through creating respectful environments where students have multiple opportunities to be heard, develop voice, address power relations and authority as they arise in the classroom. As a

means of facilitating this process, the duo challenge students to think critically through constructive confrontation, raise issues related to sexism and heterosexism, critically critique how society can be transformed, and routinely assess what part the collective (instructors and students) have in maintaining or deconstructing existing power structures.

Their version of feminist pedagogy foregrounds the development of critical thinking skills, building a community of learners and raises consciousness through linking personal experiences to structural issues (hooks, 2003). In accordance with Maher and Tetreault (2001), the feminist educators believe that feminist pedagogy should create an environment that is driven by a "caring-centered and social justice approach, which focuses on fostering a safer and more welcoming learning environment and attempts to create an open dialogic atmosphere" (Misawa & Johnson-Bailey, 2018, p. 1). Their idealized way of viewing feminist pedagogy has been the wellspring of their praxis. The educational strategies, practices, and beliefs informed and influenced by feminist pedagogy have provided a sound political and ethical framework for the university classrooms.

Conclusion

This article explored how non-White professors, a Black woman tenured professor and a gay Asian male pre-tenured professor, co-created a feminist classroom and how they negotiated their power in that classroom environment using a retrospective narrative inquiry. Although feminist pedagogy was described and explored by feminist scholars as a powerful teaching tool for educators to use to teach difficult issues such as diversity, equity, and inclusion, the faculty in this study revealed that they did not have such luxury in the classrooms because they needed to establish themselves as credible instructors before dialoguing about difficult issues. That means, these faculty of color need to have extra steps or background work to gain trust and respect from our learners prior to having critical discussions in a safer and braver learning environment (Merriweather, Guy, & Manglitz, 2018; Ramdeholl & Jones, 2022). In addition, the feminist pedagogy of their practices is one that is informed and honed by their positionalities as a Black woman and an Asian man. Such a pedagogy must take into account not only how cultures shape practices but also how the faculty members colleagues and especially students respond to what they regard as the faculty of color cultural "uniqueness" and accompanying mandatory racialized and gendered agendas. Thus, race and gender matter in feminist classrooms.

References

Baker, P & Copp, M (1997). Gender matters most: The interaction of gendered expectations,
feminist course content, and pregnancy in student course evaluation. *Teaching Sociology 25*(1), 29–43.

Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice and mind.* Basic Books.

Brookfield, S. D. (2015). The skillful teacher: On technique, trust, and responsiveness in the classroom. John Wiley & Sons.

Brookfield, S. D. (2017). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. John Wiley & Sons.

Chepyator-Thomson, R. (2000). Black women's experiences in teaching Euro-American students in higher education: Perspectives on knowledge production and reproduction, classroom discourse, and student resistance. *Journal of Research Association of Minority Professors, 4*(2), 9–20.

Clandini, D. J., & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland spaces and tensions. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 35-76). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Closson, R. B., Bowman, L., & Merriweather, L. R. (2014). Toward a race pedagogy for Black faculty. *Adult Learning, 25*(3), 82-88.

Cranton, P., & Taylor, E. W. (2011). Transformative learning. In P. Jarvis & M. Watts (Eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of learning* (pp. 214-223). Routledge.

Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.) (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement.* The New Press.

de Beauvoir, S. (1968). *The Second Sex*. New York: Modern Library.

Delano-Oriaran, O. O., & Parks, M. W. (2015). One Black, one White: Power, White privilege, & creating safe spaces. *Multicultural Education*, *22*, 15-19.

Denzin, N. K. (1989). *Interpretive biography* (Vol. 17). Sage.

Diller, A. (2018). The ethics of care and education: A new paradigm, its critics, and its educational significance. In A. Diller, B. Huston, K. Morgan, & M. Ayim (Eds.), *The gender question in education* (pp. 89-104). Routledge.

Freedman, D. (2006). Reflections on the research process: Emancipatory research or emancipatory zeal? *Reflective Practice, 7*(1), 87-99.

Griffin, K. A., Pifer, M. J., Humphrey, J. R., & Hazelwood, A. M. (2011). (Re) defining departure:
Exploring Black professors' experiences with and responses to racism and racial climate. *American Journal of Education, 117*(4), 495-526.

Hoffmann, F. L., & Stake, J. E. (1998). Feminist pedagogy in theory and practice: An empirical investigation. *NWSA Journal*, 79-97.

Hooks, B. (1989). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking Black*. South End Press.

Hooks, B. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope.* Routledge.

Isaac-Savage, E. P., & Merriweather, L. R. (2021). Preparing adult educators for racial justice. New Directions
for Adult and Continuing Education, 2021(170), 109-118.

Johnson-Bailey, J., & Cervero, R. M. (1998). Power dynamics in teaching and learning practices: Anexamination of two adult education classrooms. International Journal of Lifelong Education, 17(6), 389-399.

Johnson-Bailey, J. (2001). *Sistahs in college: Making a way out of no way.* Krieger.

Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, M. (2006). Transformational teaching and the practices of black women adult
educators. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 109,* 49-58.

Johnson-Bailey, J. & Cervero, R. M. (2008). Different worlds and divergent paths: Academic careers defined by race and gender. *Harvard Educational Review, 78*(2), 311-332.

Johnson-Bailey, J. & Lee, M. (2005). Women of color in the academy: Where's our authority in the classroom? *Feminist Teacher, 15*(2), 111-122.

Johnson-Bailey, J. & Misawa, M. (2017). *Examining positionality in feminist pedagogy: Do race and gender still matter in feminist classrooms?* Paper presented at the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education Annual Conference 2018, Memphis, TN. Abstract retrieved from https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.aaace.org/resource/resmgr/2017_conference/AAACE_FINAL_ONSITE_Program.F.pdf

Kumashiro, K. K. (Ed.). (2001). *Troubling intersections of race and sexuality: Queer students of color and anti-oppressive education.* Rowman & Littlefield.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97*, 47–68.

Maher, F. A., & Tetreault, M.K. (2001). *The feminist classroom: Dynamics of gender, race, and privilege* (Expanded ed.). Basic Books.

Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (2002). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophical and practical guide*. Routledge.

McNiff, J. (2017). *Action research: All you need to know.* SAGE Publications, Inc.

Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2014). *Adult learning: Linking theory and practice.* Jossey-Bass.

Merriweather, L. R., & Guy, T. C., & Manglitz, E. (2018). Creating the condition for racial dialogues. In B. Smith (Ed.), *Teaching race: How to help students unmask and college racism* (pp. 131-150). John Wiley & Sons.

Mezirow, J. (2018). Transformative learning theory. *In Contemporary theories of learning* (pp. 114-128). Routledge.

Misawa, M. (2010). Musing on controversial intersections of positionality: A queer crit perspective in adult and continuing education. In V. Sheared, J. Johnson-Bailey, S. A. J. Colin, E. Peterson, & S. D. Brookfield (Eds.), *The handbook of race and adult education: A resource for dialogue on racism* (pp. 187-199). Jossey-Bass.

Misawa, M. (2019). *Practicing a culturally responsive feminist pedagogy in higher education: An examination of a feminist classroom from the perspective of transformative learning.* Paper presented at the 2019 Adult Education Research Conference, Buffalo, NY. Paper retrieved from https://newprairiepress.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4146&context=aerc

Misawa, M. (2022). Transformative learning as a passageway to social justice in higher education: An Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) perspective on anti-bullyist practice in a North American context. In A. Nicolaides, S. Eschenbacher, P. T. Buergelt, Y. Gilpin-Jackson, M. Welch, & M. Misawa (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of learning for transformation* (pp. 571-589). Palgrave Macmillan.

Misawa, M. & Johnson-Bailey, J. (2018). *Examining feminist pedagogy from the perspective of transformative learning: Do race and gender matter in feminist classroom?* Paper presented at the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults/The Italian Transformative Learning Network Conference 2018, Milan, Italy. Abstract retrieved from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Af0O3oT0PC8DixnECYVKiWLebj9Edj1N/view?usp=sharing

Outlaw, L. T., Jr. (1983). Race and class in the theory and practice of emancipatory social transformation. In L. Harris (Ed.), *Philosophy born of struggle: Anthology of African-American philosophy from 1917* (pp. 117–129). Kendall/Hunt.

Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage publications.

Rains, F. V. (1998). Is the benign really harmless? Deconstructing some "benign" manifestations of operationalized White privilege. In J. L. Kincheloe, S. R. Steinberg, N. M. Rodriguez, & R. E. Chennault (Eds.), *White reign: Deploying whiteness in America* (pp. 76-101). St. Martin's Griffin.

Ramdeholl, D., & Jones, J. (2022). *Confronting institutionalized racism in higher education: Counternarratives for racial justice. Routledge.*

Romney, P., Tatum, B., & Jones, A. (1992). Feminist strategies for teaching about oppression: The importance of process. *Women's Studies Quarterly, 20*(1-2), 95-110.

Sue, D. W., Rivera, D. P., Watkins, N. L., Kim, R. H., Kim, S., & Williams, C. D. (2011). Racial dialogues: Challenges faculty of color face in the classroom. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *17*(3), 331.

Taylor, E. (2000). Fostering Mezirow's transformative learning theory in the adult education classroom: A critical review. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education, 14*(2), 1-28.

Tisdell, E. J. (1998). Poststructural feminist pedagogies: The possibilities and limitations of feminist emancipatory adult learning theory and practice. *Adult Education Quarterly, 48*(3), 139-156.

Tuitt, F., Hanna, M., Martinez, L. M., Salazar, M., & Griffin, R. (2009). Teaching in the line of fire: Faculty of color in the academy. *Thought & Action*, *25*(20), 65-74.

Vargas, L. (1998). "When the 'Other' Is the Teacher: Im- plications of Teacher Diversity in Higher Education." *Urban Review,* 31(4), 359–383.

Williams, M., Dunlap, M., & McCandies, T. (1999). Keepin' it real: Three Black women educators discuss how we deal with student resistance to multicultural inclusion in the curriculum. *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy, 10*(2), 11-23.

Wing, A. K. (Ed.). (1997). *Critical race feminism: A reader*. New York University Press.

About the Authors

Dr. Mitsunori Misawa is an Associate Professor and Associate Department Head in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. His major areas of research center on social justice and adult higher education and encompass the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexual orientation, academic and workplace bullying, transformative learning, policy and leadership studies, program planning and evaluation, and social sciences research methodologies (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods). His scholarly work examines the positionality of agents (faculty, students, and administrative staff) alongside policies in adult and higher education using learning theories and sociocultural concepts such as Critical Theory, Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Queer Theory to understand how agents influence each other's educational experiences and determine the ways in which adult and higher education institutions can more effectively serve diverse populations in contemporary society. Dr. Misawa co-edited a handbook, *The Palgrave Handbook on Learning for Transformation* (2022), which focused on transformative learning and transformation through education in a global context. His scholarship has been widely published and is well recognized by national and international scholarly communities.

Dr. Juanita Johnson-Bailey is the Centennial Professor in Women's Studies at University of Georgia. She also holds the Josiah Meigs Distinguished Teaching Professorship and the title of Distinguished University Professor. A member of the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame, she specializes in researching race and gender in education and workplace settings. Her significant contributions to the literature in adult education, higher education and women's studies include publications in: Harvard Educational Review, Teachers College Record (Columbia University), Journal of Higher Education, and the Journal of Negro Education.

e-Mail: mmisawa@utk.edu