CHAPTER 15.

ADVOCATING "ACTIVE" INTERSECTIONALITY THROUGH A COMPARISON OF TWO SLUTWALKS

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A central contribution of Women's and Feminist Studies is the concept of intersectionality: the notion that many social groups experience oppression along multiple systems, and that those systems are conceptually and materially inseparable. Examining how community organizers actually do and do not employ intersectionality in their activism advances civic engagement scholarship seeking to improve emancipatory activist practices. This chapter briefly reviews intersectionality as a concept, and then reviews the different ways two groups of feminist activists organized "Slutwalk" protest marches in their local communities. While one group, Slutwalk Toronto, demonstrates an effectively intersectional civic action, the other, Slutwalk Minneapolis, shows how a passive approach to intersectionality fosters community exclusion. The chapter concludes by suggesting that "active" intersectional organizing, as evidenced by Slutwalk Toronto, is an engaged, intentional process that explicitly foregrounds and values the breadths and depths of perspectives within feminist social groups. Furthermore, Slutwalk Toronto willingly held identity differences in productive tension with one another at multiple levels throughout the organizing process.

In the 2011 National Women's Studies Association White Paper, "Women's Studies as Civic Engagement: Research and Recommendations," contributors conclude with a final recommendation on civic engagement in higher education: to "come to *terms*," by developing "common language to speak about the importance of civic engagement across disciplines, units, and surrounding communities" (Orr, 2011, p. 24). They argue that doing so is "urgently required, not just to make Women's Studies contributions intelligible beyond its disciplinary

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borders but to allow for more meaningful exchanges about the practice of civic engagement at every level" (p. 24). If part of improving civic engagement scholarship depends on better utilizing insights from Women's Studies and establishing common language, then the term and value that is *intersectionality* must be included, because as McCall (2005) writes, intersectionality may well be "the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far" (p. 1771).

Since many disciplines take up civic engagement in their work, intersectionality offers a significant opportunity for the unique disciplinary contributions of Women's Studies to be recognized as integral to related civic scholarship. This chapter aims to help develop common language and understanding about what intersectional activism is in civic engagement. I begin by reviewing what intersectionality means, followed by a comparative evaluation of two seemingly similar feminist protest events through an intersectional lens, and conclude with a discussion of how an expectation of *active* intersectionality (rather than *passive*) may help scholars evaluate intersectionality in activism. Moreover, the concept of active intersectionality can help feminist teachers interrogate their roles in, and the material conditions of, developing ethical feminist community engagement.

UNDERSTANDING INTERSECTIONALITY

The concept of intersectionality is owed to non-white feminists and is frequently cited as the signature of "third-wave"[1] feminist theory and praxis. Asian American feminist activist Kristina Wong summarizes a basic definition nicely: "Third wave feminism was a response by women of color and others who felt homogenized by a movement defined by the goals of middle-class, white women" (2003, p. 295). Feminist writers Baumgardner and Richards extend this idea further, suggesting, "it is exactly that multiplicity—of individuals and of expertise, among other qualities—that we believe defines third wave leadership" (2003, pp. 159-160). Diversifying narratives, challenging interpretive frameworks that emerge from particular standpoints, geopolitical locations (white, hetero), is therefore a signature of third wave thought.

Discourses of *difference itself* have become one of the most valuable lenses of truth feminism has skilled. Rather than divide feminist agendas along lines of difference, third wave theorists suggest that difference be recognized, named,

1 Much has been published about how the wave metaphor in feminist history is problematic and Zarnow suggests that the feminist wave metaphor is not only artificial, but detrimentally "compresses the highly nuanced reworking of feminist thought and practice," (2010, p. 274). See also: Fernandes, 2010; Sandavol, 2000; Schiappa, 2015; Thompson, 2010, to name a few.

respected and empowered as a mechanism of camaraderie. Pursuing freedom from oppression involves recognizing the ways in which systematized exclusions are distinctive *and yet also* emerge and are sustained by intersecting dominant cultural logics. For example, both patriarchal and white supremacist ideologies position women and people of color as dehumanized objects. Thus, many feminists agree that the third wave feminism must be particularly alert to issues of intersectionality, multiculturalism and identity politics (Fernandes, 2010, p.99). Emphasizing how various forms of institutionalized inequity, such as racism and classism, are not only necessarily *relevant* to feminist interventions but are *inherently* intersecting processes and must be discussed together. Despite intersectionality being a trademark of third wave feminism, mainstream feminists relentlessly prioritize white, hetero, middle-class experiences.

As women of color continued to reject, overcome, and negotiate their marginalization by mainstream feminism's exclusivity (namely along lines of race but also in its homophobia and classism), several key transformative works emerged. With the publication of Demita Frazier, Beverly Smith, and Barbara Smith's *Combahee River Collective Statement* (1977), Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), Barbara Smith's *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (1983), Audre Lorde's *I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing Across Sexualities* (1986), among many others, the key voices of influence in western feminism shifted. The ideas and experiences at the heart of these works were not new then and are not very different now, but the publication and amplification of such voices impacted mainstream feminism forever. The aggregate result of the increased visibility of women of color in mainstream feminism is the moral and material necessity of intersectionality in organizing feminist interventions, and community engagement initiatives. No longer can mainstream feminism deny its long-overdue obligation to a more inclusive social project that actively foregrounds issues of race, class, ability, and sexual orientation. Intersectionality must inform any feminist pedagogical or activist project seeking social, political and moral viability.

Despite its nearly ubiquitous reference in contemporary feminist discourse, few writers thoroughly define what it means for an idea or practice to *actually* be intersectional, especially in relation to civic engagement and feminist rhetorical pedagogies. I submit a brief summary of the concept here in an effort to clarify what intersectionality itself means and the common language that surrounds it. This summary serves as a way to ground a comparative analysis of two feminist interventions by the same name, Slutwalk, and the organizing activities shaping each. Both Slutwalks seemingly emerge from the same feminist ethos, but ultimately differ in the ways they do, and do not, demonstrate intersectional praxis.

Most broadly, intersectionality represents feminism that explicitly connects

women's issues to issues of race, class, sexuality, and ability (Third Wave History). Further, intersectionality is a value and term underscoring two coexisting truths: first, the fact that many social groups experience oppression along *multiple* planes, and second, that those planes are conceptually and materially *inseparable*. For example, consider Audre Lorde's (1986) essay describing her experiences as Black lesbian in the feminist community, in which she articulates her own necessarily intersectional identity:

> When I say I am a Black feminist, I mean I recognize that my power as well as my primary oppressions come as a result of my Blackness as well as my womanness, and therefore my struggles on both these fronts are inseparable. (Lorde, 1986, p. 4)

The term 'intersectionality' itself was first introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 and 1991. In 1992, Rebecca Walker authored a brief *Ms.* magazine article titled "Becoming the Third Wave" signaling a call for a collective shift in feminist consciousness that explicitly includes civically engaged activism (Third Wave History). Walker wrote, "My involvement must reach beyond my own voice in discussion, beyond voting, beyond reading feminist theory. My anger and awareness must translate into tangible action" (1992, p. 40). Thus, as feminists of color were working diligently to mobilize, protect, and uplift their communities they were also animating contemporary examples of actively intersectional feminist praxis.

Perhaps the most famous iteration of intersectionality is found in bell hooks' influential phrase "imperialist-white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy" (Media Education Foundation, 2006). Other iterations of these connections are found across social justice scholarship. Iris Marion Young's (2011) excellent work differentiating "five faces" of oppression suggests that most social groups experience oppression in the form of marginalization, violence, cultural imperialism, exploitation, and/or powerlessness. Most feminists are personally familiar with at least one of these faces, but many know them all. Mexican American women experience not only cultural imperialism in a nation that devalues and appropriates Mexican culture, but also exploitation and marginalization in the form of unequal power, labor and commodity distributions between men and women. It is with such an identity experience in mind that intersectionality goes further, past differentiating faces of oppression, to insisting that exploitation not be theorized without marginalization, because they function cooperatively. An intersectional critique of exploitative working conditions must necessarily examine factors constraining workers' abilities to influence those conditions, such as disenfranchisement through powerlessness.

Therefore, a fundamental piece of intersectional work is the prioritization of liberating those social groups who experience several faces of oppression simultaneously throughout their lives. Finally, intersectional theory asserts that the moments or places oppressive systems intersect are *knowable and therefore changeable*, making intersectionality a useful, relevant practice in feminist interventions and pedagogies. To better illustrate how intersectionality can be assessed and practiced in real ways, I compare two activist events, each organized separately but both part of the same broader feminist movement against sexual violence and rape culture. Organized by women in their local communities, each activist process culminates in an annual protest march called *Slutwalk*.

SLUTWALK

> "You know, I think we're beating around the bush here. I've been told I'm not supposed to say this—however, women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized."

The inexcusable words of Toronto police officer Constable Michael Sanguinetti have been etched in my mind since I first encountered them in April of 2011, only weeks after he'd uttered them at a poorly attended safety discussion at York University. I often wonder what Sanguinetti might say now of his comments, knowing they'd serve as the fertilizer for sowing one of the most controversial public feminist interventions in decades. His 32 careless words spurred a small group of young women, mostly students, to organize a march that would eventually inspire tens of thousands of women and men to protest rape culture and sexual violence in hundreds of cities across over sixty countries.

The first Slutwalk, Slutwalk Toronto, took place on April 3, 2011. An estimated 3,000+ community participants marched from a local park to a city police station with signs and chants denouncing rape culture, victim blaming, slut-shaming, and inadequate police training on sexual violence. The walk's name, aesthetic and message garnered substantial media attention and quickly circulated the feminist blogosphere, receiving hefty support and criticism. Subsequently, other Slutwalks popped up across North American cities, some in communication with Toronto's original organizers, and others wholly autonomously. Every Slutwalk is initiated, organized, and funded independently. Most walks include a mission statement denouncing rape culture and working to challenge mindsets and stereotypes of victim blaming and slut-shaming around sexual violence. Walks also tend to include community-specific outcomes.

Despite many characterizations of Slutwalk as a headquartered movement with a consistent mission, the differences between Slutwalks are as varied as

feminists and communities themselves. When I compare Slutwalk Toronto with Slutwalk Minneapolis, I am comparing two versions of the same feminist interventionist ethos, but also the earnestly different ways in which each group of feminist community activists organized their local protests. I contacted the lead Slutwalk Minneapolis organizer, Kim directly and obtained permission to closely observe Slutwalk Minneapolis's organizing process over the next year,[2] culminating in Slutwalk Minneapolis 2012.

Slutwalk Minneapolis

Throughout the summer there were sporadic meetings organized via unidirectional emails to existing organizers for Slutwalk Minneapolis, who often proclaimed intersectional values. On average, seven to nine people attended, sitting in the back community room at a local coffee and gelato shop that seemed familiar to those there. With no spare seating, I sat on the floor and mapped the room, noting that it could not have easily accommodated individuals with limited physical mobility. Aside from myself, no one took notes, and discussion was driven by a sparse agenda provided by Kim. In contrast to Slutwalk Toronto's all-female organizers, Slutwalk Minneapolis's meetings featured three men, one of whom was the head organizer's close friend. My records consistently remark upon the heavy-handedness of Kim and her friend Nick's influence on the meeting's topics, organization, scheduling, and decision-making.

The more I observed, the clearer it became that the foremost priority for that year's walk was increasing the number of attendees and finding ways to generate income. Organizers worried that the attendance from the year prior, approximately 500 people, would not be matched, as they anticipated 200 participants. Beyond growing attendance to increase the walk's visibility, organizers sought to recruit "membership" subscriptions requiring membership fees and increasing sales of merchandise to produce income.

When discussing building stronger relationships with potential allies in the community, several participants suggested reaching out to a particularly reputable local nonprofit focused on counseling and advocating for survivors of sexual violence and abuse. I observed the following conversation regarding involving that organization:

Participant: "I can try to meet them on [these] days?"

2 Regarding IRB, I met with faculty and exchanged emails with an IRB contact and found the research work to be exempt if I worked within the territory of *Public* events and personas, and did not ask participants any questions regarding their personal experiences (especially avoiding potentially triggering subject matter), instead focusing on organizing strategies and public discourses.

Kim: "I can't meet then."

Nick: "Fuck them."

That was the entirety of the exchange, the collective suggestion not only rejected, but also flippantly disregarded. During a later organizing meeting the lead organizers feigned interest in "trying to build stronger allies within the community, but it probably won't happen until after the walk." Currently Slutwalk Minneapolis' webpage lists one local shelter as a local resource for survivors and victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence (Slutwalk Minneapolis).

Most ideas presented by other volunteers were dismissed or scorned outright. This began with suggestions to better employ social media to reach the community more broadly. Whenever the subject of social media arose it'd quickly be characterized as "a distraction" or "an electronic thing that's getting harder and harder," or, anecdotally, a thing "I fucking hate right now." When one volunteer suggested not underestimating social media tools, and several individuals in attendance nodded in passionate agreement, Nick groaned, "we've mined out the social media angle," and my notes concluded: "the idea didn't grow." Toward the end of one meeting Kim openly asked the group, "Anything else?" Gently, a young transgender woman named Andrea, a particularly active volunteer, shared that she'd felt excluded in the decision-making process:

Andrea: "I don't always know how to fit this in, but, we didn't reach out enough to male victims. I don't know where to fit this in but I really wanted to bring it up tonight."

Kim: "*Survivors*."

Andrea: "We need to make it more open for people to participate."

Participant: "Maybe a more inclusive message for all people . . . ."

Kim: "We do stress to not focus on female victims like other Slutwalks."

Andrea: "But we stress "my dress isn't a yes" and what does that mean for men? Let's make them know they're welcome too. I have a lot of ideas."

Kim: "Let's table it until after the walk."

This exchange was rare, in that Kim was not often challenged at all. The room felt uneasy, and Kim's tone defensive. Andrea walked outside and did not return to the meeting that evening. I later noticed her smoking a cigarette nearby and approached to ask how she felt about what had just occurred. Her voice

hesitant and eyes tearful, she expressed frustration with the process and feeling silenced. Subsequently I frequently noted Andrea's distance from Kim and the organizing group; she was energetic with other volunteers and led many chants during the walk, but did not make any other suggestions during meetings.

Figure 15.1. Andrea, preparing to lead chants at the 2012 Slutwalk, photo taken by author.

During a final meeting a different volunteer stepped outside of 'business as usual' and broached the importance of race, commenting that "given that Slutwalk has had to deal with racial issues—" she was immediately cut off by Kim, who objected, "We want to try to totally avoid that." Another participant added, "we did have those issues last year but it's glossed over quickly," while another rebutted, "but that makes it look like a white woman's walk," followed by silence. Later, in a follow-up interview, I asked Kim if she had ever intentionally reached out to community groups focused on racial justice. Her response took only two lines in my notebook: "I tried once, they were very critical, they can come to us if they want to, it's up to them." Her tone was worse than indifferent, it was annoyed and hostile. What I did not know then was that Kim had published two posts on the official Slutwalk Minneapolis blog on the subject of White Supremacy issues in the Slutwalk movement about a year prior, which I find quite revealing. The first, "White Supremacy and the Walk . . ." wonders:

> Where is that White Supremacy? Would it have made it any

> better if it were a group of black/hispanic/asian women who banded together and started the SlutWalk? And how so? Would these people who have written about White Supremacy have raised a ruckus if the SlutWalk were for people of colour only? Or would they have been upset if someone pointed out that it was reverse discrimination? *Sherva, May 18, 2011*

These comments are a clear expression of closedness to critique, an absence of awareness about how local racial justice projects are actually working diligently across the Twin Cities and addressing every single one of the issues she names, and an ironic call for increased intersectional work whilst indicting local people of color for not being "fun" to organize with. This is passive intersectionality, this is what happens when feminist interventions and activities do not explicitly vertically integrate diversity in their work; it is exclusive feminism in action. Slutwalk Minneapolis was organized by a handful of nonstudent activists who pursued a much narrower agenda grounded in their personal experiences, rather than an intentionally intersectional feminist approach committed to community listening and collaboration.

Ultimately Slutwalk Minneapolis did not sincerely attempt an intersectional feminist intervention by refusing to engage local communities of color, or impoverished neighborhoods, or existing community organizations and resources. In my observation of the walk itself, attended by just over two hundred people, I counted two Black women, amounting to 1% in a community where 19% of residents are Black (State and County, 2014). The failure on Slutwalk Minneapolis' part is not just in the unequal power balances or exclusion of more diverse and intersectional persons, but in the absence of an intentioned, committed, reflexive process.

The consequences of Slutwalk Minneapolis's failure as an intersectional interventionist project include further marginalizing the Twin Cities' women of color, further entrenching religious, racial, ethnic, and cultural minority groups' distrust of purportedly feminist projects that end up functionally excluding intersectional identities, and literally having no meaningful local material impact. There were no demands made of local universities to better support survivors of sexual assault, there were no demands of increased police accountability, or policy reform, or improved criminal justice processes, no direct messaging or engagement with local media outlets, and no efforts made to advance community outreach and educational programming. There was no sincere effort made to include diverse participants representative of the community other than those on the LGBT*QIA spectrum. In all of these ways, Slutwalk Minneapolis was inadequately intersectional and therefore inadequately feminist.

My experiences with Slutwalk Minneapolis stirred a curiosity in me about

Slutwalk Toronto's founders and how they approached organizing within their community. I'd read plenty of criticisms of Slutwalk as a bourgeoisie white feminist movement and sought to personally meet the women who started the first march, to discover firsthand their intentions and thoughts about intersectional interventions.

Slutwalk Toronto

After securing enough funding to pay for airfare and lodging for three days, I traveled to Toronto to interview as many of the Slutwalk Toronto organizers as I could. When emailing didn't work, I reached out on Twitter to the names I knew. In the end, Twitter helped me coordinate just as many interviews as emailing. Since there weren't organizing meetings during my trip and I was less familiar with the local community, I focused my questions on how past Slutwalk Toronto marches had been developed, what changes had occurred if any to those processes, reactions to criticism, and how organizers had or had not involved other community groups.

What I learned first was that despite considerable criticism that presumes otherwise, the first Slutwalk in Toronto, Canada was not organized by only bourgeois straight white women, or even feminist-identified persons. In fact, the original Slutwalk founders (of which there are five) included two women of color, at least two queer-identified women, and who earned annual incomes placing them below the poverty line. Uniquely, lead organizer Heather Jarvis resists classification as a feminist because she is uncomfortable aligning herself with a movement that empowers primarily white, westernized ideologies about women.

Another founding organizer, Alyssa Teekah, identifies as a "queer, brown (mixed South Asian roots), fat woman with middle-class privilege" (Teekah, 2015, p.33). When I asked about the composition of participants, Jarvis responded with an enthusiasm that suggested she'd been hoping I'd ask:

> There were men, there were women, there were people whose gender I'm not going to try to assign, there were people who were outwardly identifying as trans, as sex workers, and people of color, and indigenous groups, and mothers groups and I mean it was everybody you could imagine. (personal communication)

Mischaracterizing Slutwalk Toronto's original organizers and the demographics across participants is not the only common misconception influencing feminist debates on Slutwalk. As the creators of Slutwalk, the original organizers fell under a heavy and constant barrage of criticism, much of which rested on

mistaken assumptions. Another erroneous assumption about Slutwalk Toronto is that organizers did not attempt to coordinate with existing community resources focused on sexual violence. Slutwalk Toronto worked with the White Ribbon Campaign, a local program focused on teaching men and boys about fighting violence against women, as well as the Toronto Rape Crisis Center, also known as the Multicultural Women Against Rape (Jarvis, 2013, personal communciation). Reaching out to local groups and individuals whose diversities reflect the community alone is not intersectional activism. The next step is to *empower* and *integrate* those groups and individuals in the organizing process early on and being responsive to critical feedback.

Figure 15.2: Heather Jarvis, Slutwalk Toronto Organizer, leading the first Toronto march in 2011, unknown photographer.

Slutwalk Toronto's intersectionality is reflected not only in its mission statement but its organizers' willingness to renegotiate that mission statement's application based on community feedback. When participants voiced concerns, in meetings and social media spaces, about including Toronto police reform or training in the march's goals, the organizers listened. In subsequent Slutwalk Toronto marches the walk's destination changed from the Toronto police headquarters to walks that traverse the community in different ways. Slutwalk Toronto also took greater efforts to build allies in the community, especially with existing resources. Jarvis explained:

> The one thing that we did do was work towards ally-ships through, in our own ways we all had our own connections,

> some more strong in Toronto in certain rounds (more student associated or not), I knew a lot of places like Womens Resource Centers, Women in Trans Centers, um, non-profits, people that we thought. we did a lot of outreach saying, "This is who we are, we're inviting you to come, if you'd like to stand with us as an ally just let us know" that happened a lot. We contacted a lot of people, some of whom got back enthusiastically some of whom didn't, some of whom we've built relationships with since. (personal communication)

Furthermore, Slutwalk Toronto's event speakers have recently included Monica Forrester, "a 2-spirit, black, queer, Trans-femme, radical, sexworker, and activist," Blu Waters, a grandmother and member of the Metis nation of Ontario of the Cree/Métis/Micmac-Wolf Clan, Jeff Perera of the White Ribbon Campaign, known for "men working towards re-imagining masculinity and inspiring men, young men, boys and male-identified people to help end gender-based violence," Akio Maroon, who identifies as "Black, queer, mother, activist, and sex positive educator," and Kira Andry, a "agender, queer, mixed, activist and student," among several others (#SWTO2014). An assemblage of such diverse identities speaking about their communities' experiences is sufficiently representational intersectional community engagement. The point is not that diverse identities were merely physically present (although there is significance in that presence), but that they *informed* the organizing process itself and were empowered to shape the walk's goals, dialoguing language choices with organizers, and revising the outcome-goals of the walk to better address Toronto's patriarchal policing of sexual violence and treatment of victims.

After reflecting on the divisiveness of Slutwalk's naming and reassessing community goals, principle organizer Heather Jarvis left the organization and focused on founding the first International Day Against Victim Blaming only one year later, on April 3rd 2012, the anniversary of the first Slutwalk. Slutwalk Toronto's organizers, however problematic, have consistently practiced reflexivity, transparency, listening, and adjustment. Indeed, these practices may be required for effective, just intersectional feminist interventions. In addition to recognizing, valuing, involving, and empowering intersectional voices, intersectional intervention depends on commitment to a kind of changeability. The values motivating individual organizers and promoting solidarity must be versatile if they are to psychologically and materially enable transformation. Slutwalk Toronto can serve as a good example of intersectional activism, primarily in their organizing approach, openness to critique, and revision of the movement's 'mission' to better practice intersectionality and acknowledge the unique ways women of color

experience sexual violence. Finally, the sheer volume of conversation, increased awareness, and viral growth of the Slutwalk movement is deserving of some honor as a feminist intervention. Because of the young feminists who organized the first ever Slutwalk, there have been over two hundred cities where other activists organized Slutwalks to address sexual violence in their own communities and cultures, including cities across North America, Europe, Latin America, and Asia, with particularly vibrant walks in Colombia, Brazil, and India.

ACTIVE INTERSECTIONALITY

Moving forward, scholarship on feminist and intersectional community-engaged projects, and related pedagogies, may benefit from differentiating between *passive* and *active* intersectionality. Next, I review one argumentative or discursive habit I observed in feminist critiques of Slutwalk's intersectionality that permeates much of contemporary, usually white, feminist organizing and related discussion. This habit is one of *passive* intersectionality. In the first (and currently only) academic anthology on Slutwalk, *'This is what a Feminist Slut looks like': Perspectives on the Slutwalk Movement* (2015), more than half of the scholarly chapters cite and discuss an open letter to Slutwalk from a collective called Black Women's Blueprint (BWB). With great care, BWB critique Slutwalk and its organizers for choosing a name with the term 'slut' in it, a term that is experienced differently by women of color historically and currently. The letter is leveraged, often somewhat ignorantly, as an encompassing example of Black feminists' take on Slutwalk, freeing an author from needing to engage Slutwalk's racism more deeply or complexly. Across academic and popular feminist conversations, the letter is repeatedly positioned and utilized as the foremost substantive critique of Slutwalk as a white feminist project.

The problems with this pattern are at least threefold. First, non-Black feminists tend to begin and end their interrogation of whiteness in Slutwalk with the letter. That tendency implies haphazard anti-racist praxis, but also results in perpetuating the next two issues. Second, the letter is used to paint Black feminist criticism with one broad brushstroke, dissolving the many differing interpretations within that critical frame. That brushstroke is, in turn, often used to taper Black feminisms from many to one, and portray other racial identities' (such as Native American women who experience tremendously disproportionate sexual violence) exclusion from Slutwalk without much nuance. That being said, I have not encountered any discourse from women of color that fully rejects the racialization of the word *Slut*. Instead, I have found much disagreement on what to do about that racialization in organizing and conversation. Although BWB does

not find reclaiming *Slut* useful, other women of color do; it is either ignorant or dishonest to describe the myriad meanings women of color have ascribed to Slutwalk as singular (Schiappa, 2015). For example, a group of queer identified Black women in Toronto thought that Slutwalk should rename the walk "Take Back the Slut," pulling on a Toronto-based protest that had happened a couple of years earlier. Upon listening to and later speaking with BWB, Heather Jarvis commented:

> Having a certain kind of privilege to access certain language and be under certain labels without the same consequences, that's a very, very important criticism. However, many people, many women of color in Toronto had already identified as sluts. It's really difficult to say we can't just take your advice, and say we're going to do exactly what you people from New York telling us in Canada, Toronto—no, we're going to root in our cities and communities. (personal communication)

Unfortunately, the habit of employing a popular "intersectional" critique as definitive, collapses diverse opinions within feminist social groups and excuses oneself from deeper interrogation, traverses many subjects. It is a habit of purportedly intersectional praxis that Slutwalk Toronto organizer Alyssa Teekah describes as "ironic—so static that we can fail to see fluidity and diversity," where only the "most bombastic critique is king" (2015, p.32). It is to interpret only one intersection in a singular, reductive way.

Third, the persistent patterned uses of the letter have resulted in arguments about Slutwalk's intersectionality that work from an "all or nothing" place. In her essay *Feminism Forged through Trauma: Call-Out Culture and Slutwalk,* Teekah (2015) writes about her experience with "call-out culture" as a Slutwalk Toronto organizer, or with "the way current, heavily Internet-based feminism can turn into a process of publicly shaming people for not enacting the most "foolproof" politics" (p.31). Teekah goes further to describe her experience with hypercriticism as "an unwanted child of intersectionality theory" (p. 32). Here a helpful delineation is made: intersectional community engagement is not foolproof by virtue of naming itself such. It's somewhat fair to measure the intersectional character of a movement or civic activity by the presence and involvement of diversely identified persons. That, however, is clearly not a sufficient metric alone and is too often a mechanism of dismissal. Perhaps a better measure is to assess whether or not a civic project is *actively* intersectional.

Intersectional activism should demand recognition and prioritization of race, class, sexual orientation, age, and ability, in addition to gender. *Active* intersectionality is an engaged, intentioned process that foregrounds the breadths and

depths of perspectives within feminist interventions and willingly holds them in a productive tension at multiple levels. I submit that at a minimum, these levels include the imagination/creation and actual material organization processes.

An actively intersectional project would make sustained efforts to understand the implications of its work in relation to diverse identities and multiplied oppressions; it would be intersectional at the level of imagination. If feminist participants do not already represent the diversity of their community, intersectional imagination will almost always consist of reaching out to existing local resources and organizations run by and for women of color, people in poverty, and groups of diverse abilities and ages. Such efforts must include sufficient outreach and listening before and while material organizing occurs so that the process is intersectional from the moment of inception. If Slutwalk Toronto's organizers had first prioritized listening to local groups about what they thought of the march's name, they may have gained invaluable insights about the ways in which the word Slut is racialized; thus changing the name, or adding statements clarifying their choice. If most conversations ended in hearing support of the name Slutwalk, if most outreach concluded that the name reflected the community's intentions and anger too, then that'd have been a reasonable rebuttal to the criticism that later invalidated their good work for many potential allies.

Where the first level of active intersectionality consists of outreach and listening, the second requires including and empowering community members who are also interested and invested in the work of intervention. Actively intersectional community engagement is intersectional at the level of organizing, production, and practice. Slutwalk Toronto failed on the first level but attended to the second, coordinating the walk alongside existing community resources and adding organizers with diverse social locations. Slutwalk Minneapolis' head organizers may have begun with representationally intersectional leadership, but they did not actually empower others to influence the process in any meaningful sense. Organizers shut down a student's concerns about a lack of focus on campus rape, for example, by simply not recognizing the concern as valid. The student's presence in the organizing meetings had no effect whatsoever on the process itself. Inclusion must occur in earnest at the level of imagination and the level of membership agency.

This is not to suggest that *all* feminist interventions need equally accommodate one another, because they already do not and frequently cannot when it comes to actually planning protest or community engagement events. In practice, intersectional interventions present endless challenges, as they likely should to fodder listening and growth. Feminist organizers and teachers in a community with an active trans* population, for instance, should not necessarily headline

or even officially recognize, a trans-exclusive radical feminist (TERF[3]) ideology as legitimate for the intervention at hand. They might, however, set aside time and space for participants or students to dialogue and construct boundaries regarding the presence of TERFs in their activist community, for instance.

CONCLUSION

Looking back while moving forward, I want to emphasize why active intersectionality matters and how I came to understand its necessity. In their book *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies* (2012) Royster and Kirsch describe a concept and research tool that reflects a significant part of my research process: strategic contemplation. They write,

> Ultimately, with the term strategic contemplation, we want to reclaim a genre of research and scholarship traditionally associated with processes of meditation, introspection, and reflection. We suggest that using a meditative/contemplative approach allows researchers to access another, often underutilized dimension of the research process. . . . [T]his strategy suggests that researchers might linger deliberately inside of their research tasks as they investigate their topics and sources—imagining the contexts for practices; speculating about conversations with the people whom they are studying. . . . paying close attention to the spaces and places both they and the rhetorical subjects occupy in the scholarly dynamic; and taking into account the impacts and consequences of these embodiments. (pp.84-85)

Royster and Kirsch go on to suggest, "A sense of place—the physical, embodied experience of visiting places—can become a powerful research tool and an important dimension of strategic contemplation" (p.92). In the case of researching activism, where protest marches and other physical and material elements shape the actual work at hand, strategic contemplation, along with listening, is even more relevant and valuable. Strategic contemplation is a means for understanding how our sense of self and embodied experiences in physical places with

3 TERF is an acronym used to name and describe (often against but not within) Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism, or a branch of radical feminism claiming that trans* people, especially women, are not "real" women who rightly be included in feminism. TERF arguments frequently rely on biological determinism and reflect transphobia. A related radical feminist subgroup is Sex Worker Exclusionary Radical Feminism, or SWERF.

people (such as attending organizing meetings in a coffee shop in Minneapolis, or in discussion with colleagues about learning objectives), impact scholarly discoveries. In other words, the physical, psychological, and emotional experiences I have encountered through my research on Slutwalk warrant critical reflection as a part of research and pedagogical development processes. For example, when I attended Slutwalk Minneapolis organizing sessions, much of what my notes reflect are the expressions on participants' faces, whether or not an idea was supported in nonverbal ways (head nodding or shaking), the shifting mood of the space as conversations unfolded, and how the visibility of my note-taking influenced the formality of discussion. This evidences why these practices should, as Royster and Kirsch recommend, "be brought out of the shadows and highlighted as important and empowering aspects of research and teaching processes (p.86).

When I came across a participant, Andrea, crying outside after a meeting, I had to balance professional distance with a naturally empathic urge to support her, a woman who had been hurt and diminished in a space that ought have been securing for her. That experience revealed to me, as a researcher and feminist teacher, how important it truly is to practice active intersectionality in relevant contexts. When organizers performed passive intersectionality, when they invited diverse bodies but did not sincerely value or listen to what those bodies had to say, they effectively marginalized people. If a feminist intervention such as Slutwalk, through poor feminist praxis on the part of leaders, actually serves to further marginalize groups or individuals who are already oppressed, then it is a moral failure. I come to such understandings in part through strategic contemplation and listening, because such "incidents, actions, circumstances, conditions, and experiences endow our sense of being, inform the ways in which we see and interpret events" (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 94).

My observations, interviews, and participation in the Slutwalk marches eventually drew my attention more toward the attendees and how feminist engagement strategies impacted their experiences. I gained clarity about what active intersectionality can or should look like and why it matters as a practice in feminist interventions of community and pedagogical engagement. Moving forward, effective feminist interventions, ones that sincerely engage, value, respond, and empower intersectional identities throughout the stages of imagination, organizing, will improve communities and depths of learning. Interventions or teachings that do not practice active intersectionality will continue to marginalize and disempower historically underrepresented groups, the very same groups third wave feminism professedly seeks to uplift. And these are not trivial matters, for women are still disproportionately victims of violence and silencing, especially sexual violence, and are then rendered virtually helpless by patriarchal social,

criminal, and educational systems.

In making Women's and Feminist Studies' contributions more intelligible to other disciplines, especially those invested in good community and educational work, I suggest increasing attention to the practice of intersectional process. Actively intersectional activism is grounded in communities and students, listening, and material outcomes for those who are intersectionally oppressed and in immediate need of increased agency and transformation. Slutwalk is a movement focused on rejecting rape culture and sexual violence, on empowering survivors and displacing victim-blaming narratives, issues that impact women of color, poor women, and disabled women at disproportionate rates, necessitating an intersectional approach. Feminist interventionist activities will be enriched through dedication to intersectionality, and this requires involving diversity in imagining a work and executing that engagement, with an earnest willingness to empower participants and adapt over time. From Slutwalk Minneapolis we might gain insight into the limitations of not doing so, where the result is an exclusive, distant expression of a few; whereas Slutwalk Toronto offers an example of how including the voices of the many sustain a movement's visibility, impact, and intersectionality.

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