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BREAKING DOWN THE GENDERED BARRIERS IN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

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BREAKING DOWN THE GENDERED BARRIERS IN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

Critical pedagogy is a teaching philosophy that guides students to question dominant discourses and the status quo, encouraging them to reflect on the part they play in these discourses. Since critical pedagogy deals with critical consciousness and sociopolitical topics, teachers who engage in this teaching philosophy are expected to exert some power in the classroom in order for students to get to that place of critical consciousness or personal growth. However, when female-identifying teachers use their power to embody critical pedagogy in the classroom, they are often met with resistance from students and fellow colleagues, rendering them unable to effectively teach critical topics. In analyzing the masculinist origins of critical pedagogy scholarship, I argue that an intersectional-feminist perspective of critical pedagogy can mitigate these gendered dynamics at play. To address these dynamics further, I also interview female-identified faculty at a West Coast University in California, exploring the ways in which all teachers can effectively use their power to address gender inequalities that may arise in the classroom, using these narratives to spark or encourage new scholarship in this field.

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DEDICATION

To all the participants in my study who graciously shared their stories and insights, thank you. There simply would be no project without your amazing contributions. When I think of teachers enacting critical-feminist pedagogy with the utmost care, consideration, and special attention to student needs and growth, I think of all of you.

This is for you and all other critical pedagogues in the field.

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Introduction

"I think any discipline can take a critical pedagogy approach, but the way that we look at connections between knowledge and power, and between personal experience in this larger context, is through language and how it constructs the world. And I think that crucially too, for me is when you look at these connections, you're always trying to work toward larger issues of justice. That's kind of what critical pedagogy *is*, but I also don't think you can separate the *doing* of it. I don't think you can call yourself a critical pedagogue if all you do is lecture. Because one of the other things I think is really crucial to it is that you're co-constructing knowledge with students through conversation; that you're challenging ingrained hierarchies of teacher and student for example, and you're seeking to kind of flatten those."

Professor Fresta

Critical pedagogy is a teaching philosophy—developed by Paulo Freire in his book titled *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—that involves teachers encouraging students to challenge dominant discourses—in most cases, regarding gender, race, ethnicity, class, heteronormativity, etc.—in an attempt for students to achieve critical consciousness or to become possible agents of change in society. Because critical pedagogy pushes students to challenge their beliefs and reflect on the parts they play in dominant discourses, teachers need to carefully use their power to set guidelines or boundaries when discussing critical topics. This careful balancing act of power can prove to be even harder for female-identified teachers because they are tackling critical issues and breaking down dominant discourses using a pedagogy that is typically considered a masculinist or "male-dominated" field of practice (Brookes and Kelly

126-128; Bryson and Bennet-Anyikwa 133-135; Martin 80-81; and Yoon 730-733).

Because critical pedagogy encourages teachers to focus on their positionality both in and outside of the classroom, it is essential to discuss the issue of gender-based privilege regarding teaching. When male-identified teachers are typically considered to have more privilege than female-identified teachers and are at the forefront of dominant discourses, it is harder for them to recognize their privilege, but easier for them to navigate critical pedagogy *because* of their privilege. Female-identified teachers who engage in critical pedagogy tend to place a special emphasis on affective teaching, self-reflection, and negotiation of meaning between their students whereas male-identified teachers tend to focus more on the philosophy of critical pedagogy itself. Female-identified teachers are also viewed as empathetic facilitators who use an "ethics-of-care" approach to teaching while male-identified teachers are often viewed as dominant leaders in the classroom (Bryson and Bennet-Anyikwa 133-135; Chow et al. 259-260; Martin 80-81; Smele et al. 694-698; and Yoon 730-733). These harmful and stereotypical assumptions of gender and unequal power dynamics is likely the reason why male-identified teachers, when discussing with students about critical topics like race, gender, and class, are typically met with little to no resistance while female-identified teachers who discuss the same critical topics are, more often than not, met with great

resistance, especially from male-identified students (Brookes and Kelly 120; Claiborne and Lyn 33; Martin 80-81; and Yoon 730-733).

This dynamic then begs the question as to why critical pedagogy, as a teaching philosophy, is considered “more suitable” or easier to navigate for male-identified teachers than female-identified teachers? In this paper, I will argue that power dynamics and institutionalized misogyny are intrinsically woven in this teaching philosophy and an intersectional approach of critical pedagogy is the only way to unweave this web. I will also briefly discuss the masculinist origins of critical pedagogy and its approaches, analyze the feminist contributions in this teaching philosophy, and explore the ways in which female-identified teachers can use intersectionality as an approach in which to address gender inequalities present in the composition classroom. Additionally, to analyze these inequalities and to better understand the experiences of what female-identified professors go through when enacting critical pedagogy, I interviewed seven faculty members at a West Coast University in California to gather their perspectives regarding their particular teaching practices and how they personally use critical pedagogy in the classroom. Through these interviews, my goal is to address how female-identified teachers mitigate the power dynamics in the classroom when they teach critical topics and to gather helpful teaching strategies that all teachers can utilize in their classroom should they come across similar obstacles.

Addressing the “Masculinist” Origins of Critical Pedagogy

Amy Ward Martin’s article, “Playing by Different Rules: ‘Gender Switching’ and Critical Pedagogy,” was published in 2001, two decades after Paulo Freire and Ira Shor’s discussion on critical pedagogy and dialogical teaching. Martin draws on her experience as a feminist scholar in the composition classroom engaging in critical pedagogy, noting the disconnect between theory and practice in this teaching philosophy: “In effect, men seem to be doing most of the theorizing about critical pedagogy, while women seem to be doing critical pedagogy—or are at least in the best position to be doing it, as they run the majority of rhetoric and composition classrooms" (Martin 80). Here, Martin pinpoints the exact disparity within the origins of critical pedagogy: male-identified scholars focus on theory and the “big picture” while female-identified scholars tend to focus on student needs and growth. This gendered dynamic is also present in the demographic of composition teachers where the majority are female, thus playing into the long-suffering stereotype with teaching—particularly in the field of English composition—being “feminized.” Martin’s article essentially sets the stage of the gendered issues regarding critical pedagogy, discusses how the field of composition is dominated by men, and how their privilege allows them to navigate the discourse of critical pedagogy with ease.

Martin continues this gendered discussion of critical pedagogy by analyzing her teaching style in comparison to a fellow male-identified colleague’s teaching style after being criticized for her questioning methods. Martin’s male-

identified colleague confronts the silence in the classroom after an important question was asked with his *own* silence, whereas Martin rephrases the question as a way to recontextualize the question for the students when the room falls silent. Ironically, Martin's colleague argues that his use of silence gives students the power and authority in his classroom whereas Martin's approach, according to her colleague, might be considered overpowering because Martin is trying to *move* the conversation around the lull in her classroom. Martin initially viewed these approaches as stylistic or personality choices regarding particular teaching practices, and nothing more. However, Martin's colleague questioning her authority, expertise, and approaches in the classroom forced Martin to question her role as an authority figure and whether the "male" approach to critical pedagogy is the "correct" one. This experience, similar to many critical feminist pedagogues in the field, left Martin feeling unsure of her place in critical pedagogy, questioning if there really is room for her in this field.

This lingering feeling that Martin experienced is not unusual for most female-identified scholars engaging in critical pedagogy. In order to pinpoint exactly where these negative feelings or gendered disparities arise, it is necessary to critically examine the source material from scholars like Paulo Freire and Ira Shor who are considered "godfathers of critical pedagogy." The goal for Freire and Shor was to depart from teacher-centered classrooms toward the movement of a "liberatory pedagogy" where student critical consciousness is at the center. More specifically, Freire and Shor do this by promoting the critical

pedagogical method of dialogical teaching as a way to teach students to engage in critical topics in the classroom in their 1987 article, “What is the ‘Dialogical Method’ of Teaching?” Freire and Shor argue that dialogical teaching—encouraging students to lead the class through dialogue or questioning—serves students better than the traditional lecture-based classroom because it gives students agency and drastically changes the classroom dynamic in a way that makes teachers relinquish their power and authority by giving students more agency in classroom discussions.

Fittingly, Freire and Shor model their dialogic methods of teaching in their article by engaging in a casual discussion about critical pedagogy, student liberation, and the dialogic classroom. Freire and Shor essentially argue that in a teacher-centered, lecture-heavy classroom, teachers don’t know their subject matter past their extension of knowledge because they are repetitiously teaching the same material from class to class. In a dialogic classroom, the students’ opinions are brought to the forefront which usually results in teachers looking at the subject matter through a variety of perspectives, thus breaking them out of the repetitious teaching cycle many fall into. Additionally, Freire and Shor emphasize the importance of role-reversal in the classroom, with the students becoming the “instructors” and the teacher the “learner.” Shor also posits that “liberatory dialogue is a democratic communication which disconfirms domination and illuminates while affirming the freedom of the participants to re-make their culture” (Freire and Shor 14). In other words, the dialogic classroom is supposed

to represent a safe space for students to engage in democratic discussion without fear despite the heavy, uncomfortable, or emotional issues that may emerge surrounding various topics or discourses. Freire and Shor both acknowledge that the exchange and co-construction of knowledge between a teacher and his or her students is essential and that moving away from traditionalisms and leveling the educational playing field is the only way towards a liberatory or critical pedagogy.

In direct response to Freire and Shor's article—just two years after its publication—authors Ursula A. Kelly and Anne-Louise Brookes discuss the gendered nature of critical pedagogy and the dialogical teaching method that Freire and Shor advocate for, arguing that female-identified teachers don't seem to have the same power and authority that men like Freire and Shor exhibit in the writing classroom in their epistolary article, "Writing Pedagogy: A Dialogue of Hope." Freire and Shor argue that "a dialogic class needs a critical mass of participants to push the process forward and to carry along those students who will not speak but who will listen" (17), but fail to realize that the ones who are often stuck listening are the female-identified students, and at times, the female-identified teachers running the classroom. Freire and Shor's framework of giving the students more power in the dialogical classroom has merit, but the students who exercise this power are often the male-identified students who silence the female-identified students' perspectives.

Brookes and Kelly's main critique of Freire and Shor's framework of dialogic teaching is that they don't pay attention to gendered discussion dynamics at all: "Shor and Freire implicitly assume that it is not fundamentally important to problematize gender in any discussion of dialogue between women and men" (126). Additionally, Brookes and Kelly, through their experience of being critical feminist pedagogues, find that their *space* is challenged often either by male-identified colleagues or students: "Where men and women occupy mutual dialogical space, men often dominate that space...There are just so many ways in which men can police space, ways in which women often collude" (123). With this domination of space, Brookes and Kelly feel compelled to defend their expertise on a particular subject when male-identified scholars like Freire and Shor likely wouldn't have to. To situate these critiques of the dialogic classroom further, Brookes shares her polarizing experience in teaching her class titled, "Gender and Society," where she was met with some resistance from male-identified students when she used the term "misogyny" to describe the relationships the female protagonist had with men. Brookes uses this experience to critique Freire and Shor's idea of the dialogic classroom, saying that the polarizing opinions from certain students made other students uncomfortable and how this situation completely ruined the classroom dynamic.

Kelly echoes Brookes' experience in the classroom and shares her frustrations with being a critical-feminist pedagogue who is intimately aware of the emotional labor that goes into teaching; a labor in which scholars Freire and

Shor may not agree exists or is not something they personally experience. Freire and Shor's article focuses heavily on power dynamics, relinquishing authoritarianism, and advocating for a student-centered classroom, but refuses to acknowledge gendered discussion dynamics that reify these power structures and blatantly ignore issues of affect and emotional labor. Freire's insistence on "starting from [students'] daily life experiences is based in the possibility of starting from concreteness, from common sense, to reach a rigorous understanding of reality" (Freire and Shor 20), but fails to realize that in order to come to this "understanding of reality," one must critically examine where these readings or discussions come from and how they intersect with various identities. Brookes and Kelly pinpoint this oversight, among many others, to shed light on the gendered practices of teaching and how female-identified teachers' perceived lack of power can affect how they approach critical pedagogy.

While Brookes, Kelly, and Martin's experiences focused on rare, but uncomfortable instances in the classroom from students and fellow colleagues, author K Hyoejin Yoon investigates further the nature of fraught exchanges between male-identified and female-identified critical pedagogues. More specifically, Yoon critiques the outdated and theoretically-heavy nature of critical pedagogy regarding theoretical purists like Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren. Yoon references Giroux and McLaren's body of work ranging from 1983-1994; identifying masculinist patterns and gaps in their ideological frameworks. Yoon then draws on Elizabeth Ellsworth's work where she discusses the disconnect

between critical pedagogical theory and practice in Ellsworth's 1989 article "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?" Yoon puts these scholars' work side-by-side to illustrate the vast disparity between theory and practice—where scholars like Martin, Brookes, and Kelly have also identified this problem—while simultaneously encouraging critical pedagogues to invite and embrace revision of critical pedagogy.

Critical pedagogical scholars like McLaren and Giroux find dominant discourses or systems of oppression to be "affective discourses," because these systems rely on institutionalizing particular ways of *feeling* in regards to underrepresented or marginalized groups. Though Yoon agrees with McLaren and Giroux's argument surrounding affective discourses, she finds that they miss the mark or blatantly ignore other uses of affect theory concerning critical pedagogy. Yoon, instead, argues that affect should "deconstruct the binary of rational versus irrational" subjects in critical pedagogy (Yoon 723). In other words, Yoon wants scholars to stray away from the problematic notions of an *irrational* or overly-emotional student versus the *rational*, level-headed critical pedagogue, and alternatively, encourage scholars to view critical pedagogy through an affective lens that explores all subjects through various or intersecting identities. Essentially, Yoon criticizing the binary of the *rational* versus *irrational* subject complicates the masculinist, domineering, and essentializing framework of critical pedagogy and sparks new, affective dimensions of this teaching philosophy.

Similar to Yoon, Ellsworth also finds critical pedagogical methodologies to be lacking and reinforcing power dynamics in the classroom. More specifically, Ellsworth shares her frustration when engaging with critical pedagogy in a graduate course arguing that “critical pedagogy's ideals about democratic participation and rational debate were inadequate, and indeed reinforced relations of domination” (Yoon 729). Ellsworth finds that creating a safe space for students to converse about systems of oppression is not enough because the various identities of the students in conjunction with the oppressive environment of academia and the *authoritative* nature of the teacher can exacerbate students’ feelings of anxiety or lack of safety (Yoon 729). Because of this, Ellsworth argues that critical pedagogy is flawed in its design, doesn’t empower students, and reifies power structures that students and teachers are meant to examine or break down together.

Revered critical pedagogues McLaren and Giroux vehemently disagreed with Ellsworth’s concerns and sentiments, while Yoon supports Ellsworth and critiques McLaren and Giroux’s insensitive remarks. Yoon hones in on McLaren’s critique, paraphrasing his pointed and gendered viewpoints:

> McLaren sets up a dichotomy between the emotional, feminine, failed practitioner and the objective, authoritative, masculine figure of the transformative intellectual and the tradition of critical pedagogy, which are effectively removed from scrutiny. His gendered and rationalist

> perspective works to further delegitimize Ellsworth as emotional and womanly, and he attributes her failure to those qualities (Yoon 730).

Yoon then emphasizes the issues of these problematic assertions made by McLaren and further details the implications of his defense against Ellsworth:

> We are led to conclude that if [Ellsworth] were more rational, more impervious to affective tides—or, in other words, more manly—then she wouldn't have failed, but rather would've been able to let the truth and inherent efficacy of critical pedagogy emerge. We are to think that Ellsworth ruined it because she didn't practice critical pedagogy right; it had nothing to do with possible flaws in critical pedagogical theories (Yoon 730).

In Yoon's interpretation of McLaren's critique, Yoon pinpoints the duplicitous dichotomy of affect and sentimentality inherent in McLaren's perspective of critical pedagogy. McLaren argues that affective discourses exist in critical pedagogy, yet there is no room for *feelings* in the classroom, especially not from a teacher who is supposed to be an authoritative figure. Yoon criticizes McLaren's selectiveness regarding what is considered *appropriately* affective or emotional versus what is not, arguing that his gatekeeping of critical pedagogy is gendered and inherently misogynistic.

In breaking down Giroux's problematic critique, Yoon analyzes the implications of his remarks and how they can be taken: "Indirectly, Giroux suggests that Ellsworth is a quitter—she gave up on critical pedagogy rather than

staunchly supporting the 'vision'" (Yoon 730). Essentially, the view of "doing critical pedagogy the right way" only perpetuates the idea that there is a particular end goal for critical pedagogy and that if teachers don't reach this almost unattainable goal, they are failures and critical pedagogy isn't for them. This problematic, gate-keeping, and self-serving view of critical pedagogy that McLaren and Giroux perpetuate doesn't take into account the emotional work woven into this teaching philosophy and refuses to acknowledge that teaching is a reiterative process that is constantly changing and in flux. Their views also don't take into account the fact that students and teachers can get caught up in the emotions of this teaching philosophy because critical pedagogy forces individuals to question systems of oppression and their place in these systems, which can prove to be traumatic or uncomfortable.

Many feminist scholars—like Brookes, Kelly, Martin, Ellsworth, and Yoon—have critiqued approaches to critical pedagogy, particularly because of the masculinist approaches to this teaching philosophy and the assumption that if critical pedagogy isn't easily navigable without issue or student pushback, the teacher must be doing something "wrong." Yoon addresses this particular issue by arguing that critical pedagogy *is* inherently an affective teaching philosophy and encourages fellow scholars to view and teach critical topics through an affective lens. Yoon is intimately aware of the perceptions that "affect and sentimentality have typically been gendered feminine, and associated with nurturing and love, 'soft' emotions that belie vulnerability, infirmity and,

occasionally, moral rectitude, (Yoon 723)" but deems affective teaching a necessity because critical pedagogy forces both students and teachers to challenge or uproot their feelings on a particular topic or discourse. Yoon not only substantiates the criticisms of fellow feminist scholars before her, she extends these criticisms and offers affect theory as a pliable option to rid critical pedagogy of its masculinist origins.

Critical-Intersectional Feminist Scholarship and Practices

Because scholars like Brookes, Kelly, Martin, and Yoon have all identified the emotional labor woven into critical teaching and argued that an affective-based approach to critical pedagogy creates space for female-identified teachers to navigate misogyny in and around critical pedagogy, it is also essential to discuss what a "critical-feminist pedagogue" approach might look like. Authors BJ Bryson and Victoria A. Bennet-Anyikwa essentially discuss the importance of including feminist pedagogy in the classroom, arguing that this is one possible way to liberate students in their education. The authors insist that, "[Feminist pedagogy] is a teaching methodology that seeks to address the challenges of the multicultural classroom and to include marginalized voices when employed" (Bryson and Bennet-Anyikwa 136), drawing on socio-political, cultural, and affective frameworks to address content in the classroom. The authors also discuss the importance of how "shared stories are seen as 'gifts' among course participants with reminders of confidentiality as disclosure and intimacy develops

within groups and the class" (141), encouraging students to share these moments if they are so compelled.

While critical pedagogy does focus on various discourses and systems of oppression, it is arguably imperative for teachers who engage in this teaching philosophy to emphasize their positionality and to acknowledge intersectional identities in their classrooms. Intersectionality is a concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw that emphasizes the interplay of social classifications—like race, gender, sexual orientation, and class—and how these various identities and categorizations operate within different systems of oppression. The general consensus across all intersectional feminist scholars is to urge teachers to be aware of their positionality in these systems of oppression and to make sure the curriculum they design is multiculturally inclusive and doesn't tread the territory of tokenism (Alexander and Rhodes 431-435; Busse et al. 41-44; Claiborne and Lyn 31-35; Chow et al. 260-261; hooks 39-42; and Smele et al. 691-694). By including intersectional content and embodying their various identities, teachers are not only contributing to the breadth of knowledge for their students; they are helping their students navigate their identities across different discourses they are a part of and empathetically attuning them to discourses they are not familiar with.

Naming what intersectional-critical feminist pedagogy *is* and arguing that this teaching practice involves negotiating meaning and participating in particular social justice issues through self-reflection and empathy gives teachers

confidence to put this name or framework to practice. Scholars like Corrie Claiborne and Jamila S. Lyn encourage their students to insert themselves in empathetic positions in their pilot course titled, “Reimagining Black Masculinity, Ending Sexual Violence.” Claiborne and Lyn designed a first-year composition course at Morehouse College—a historically black and single-gender institution—centering on toxic masculinity and negative racial stereotypes of black manhood. Claiborne and Lyn use a student-centered service-learning approach as a way to teach writing in hopes that it would spark students’ interests to voluntarily participate in community activism in the near future.

For instance, the authors used the blatant violence against women displayed in most rap lyrics to illustrate to their students the way that popular media slut-shames or degrades women on a global scale. However, in doing so, the authors were met with some resistance from their students when they tried to implement feminist media/voices in the course and realized that “some of our students had been conditioned to question our authority simply because we are women and are therefore perceived as being less intellectual and overly emotional” (Claiborne and Lyn 33). Regardless of this fact, Claiborne and Lyn remained steadfast in their approach and realistic in their goals:

> If our class discussions lead students to critique the misogynistic culture that surrounds them, to think twice about calling a woman anything other than her name, to not assume that they have a right to monopolize someone’s time and attention, or to not catalogue a woman’s body parts if

she happens to be walking down the street, then our course objectives have been achieved. (35)

Claiborne and Lyn recognized the uphill battle they would have to face as intersectional-critical-feminist pedagogues and muddled through it to better their students and encourage them to be community activists.

In teaching this specialized course, both Claiborne and Lyn were met with male-identified student resistance similar to what Brookes and Kelly went through in their own classrooms. The difference in Claiborne and Lyn's experience, however, was the fact that they acknowledge the resistance they felt and had an open dialogue about it with their students. Claiborne and Lyn weren't scared to exercise their power as teachers, so much so that they had no problem addressing the issue head on by having students confront their own biases and prejudices and having them self-reflect on why they might have reacted the way they did with either the subject matter or the teachers' instruction of it. Claiborne and Lyn cultivated an uncomfortable space for students to live in so that they could feel the toxicity of their prejudices and work to become better men. Claiborne and Lyn emphasized the intersectionality of race and gender as a way to frame their pilot course by teaching their male-identified students' various concepts from black feminist scholars and encouraging them to critically examine their positionality both as students and as young black men in their communities.

Additionally, an intersectional feminist approach to critical pedagogy essentially utilizes similar strategies and frameworks (like dialogical teaching),

but places a special emphasis on self-reflection/positionality and negotiation of meaning between a teacher and one's students. This requires a teacher to set very clear boundaries and to cultivate a safe classroom environment because this approach relies heavily on sharing personal experiences in order to achieve personal growth. Chow et al. give teachers a flexible framework to engage in critical pedagogy that invites students to actively dialogue, participate, and share their experiences in the classroom. Interweaving dialogical teaching with experiential teaching allows students to participate in and grapple with heavy topics that uproot their worldviews, or at the very least, have them critically think about why they view certain topics the way they do. In doing so, the classroom experience is more controlled because a teacher and his or her students can co-construct knowledge with one another (dialogical), then switch gears to having the students take the reins in their own learning by doing hands-on projects/assignments (participatory), and then reflect on and apply what they learned from the class discussions and the assignments (experiential).

There are many ways teachers can use this "DPE" method in action. For instance, a teacher can assign a reading on racism and then have students discuss the reading in class in a Socratic Seminar, thus engaging in a *dialogue* with one another. The teacher can set the boundaries for the Socratic Seminar by keeping students on-topic and reminding students to remain critically conscious and aware of their surroundings and others' feelings. The teacher can then have students *participate* in their own learning by having them create a

hypothetical community service project. After students participate in their own learning, they can then use their *experience* to reflect on what they have done for the project or explain how this project impacted them. The *experience* part of the DPE method is definitely one of the most emotionally challenging aspects for students because they are forced to self-reflect. Because of this, teachers can have students post anonymously on a discussion board so that students don't feel so vulnerable and exposed. Essentially, the DPE method allows teachers to relinquish their roles of "instructors," allowing them to become "learners," therefore leveling the playing field—like Freire and Shor originally advocated—for the students so that they can feel safe to share their opinions on critical topics in the classroom. Scholars like Claiborne, Lyn, and Chow et al. contribute to the field of critical pedagogy by applying various frameworks from critical race studies, feminist studies, multicultural studies, gender and queer studies, and affect studies, breathing new life into this teaching philosophy and giving teachers tangible practices to utilize in the classroom.

Narratives from Teachers in the Field

In interviewing female-identified professors at a West Coast University in California, my goal is to gather their perspectives regarding student pushback when teaching critical topics. Knowing that not all of the teachers would consider themselves critical pedagogues, but nevertheless include aspects of this type of teaching in their classrooms—such as politics of writing, antiracist teaching, breaking down dominant discourses/systems of oppression—I asked them open-

ended research questions (in order to gather the most comprehensive responses) regarding critical pedagogy:

- How would you personally define critical pedagogy?
- What has your experience been like as a female-identifying teacher who engages in critical pedagogy?
- What are some of the practices you use or critical topics you like to focus on?
- Have you faced any pushback/resistance from students and/or fellow faculty members regarding your pedagogical practices?
- How do you address gender inequalities if/when they happen in the classroom?
- What scholarship has influenced your thinking about critical pedagogy?

My goal in this study is to ascertain 1) How can female-identified teachers mitigate the power dynamics in the classroom when they teach critical topics (i.e., social issues/social justice topics)? 2) What are some strategies/teaching methods that female-identified teachers can use to get students to a place of critical consciousness/awareness? These research questions and goals aim to gather these teachers' range of perspectives regarding this barrier and offer strategies or ways to mitigate the gendered aspects of critical pedagogy to propose change or encourage new scholarship in this field.

Since this project emphasizes an intersectional-feminist approach to critical pedagogy, it is essential to provide demographic information of the professors that were interviewed. All participants have acquired a doctorate and are considered middle-class. The age range of participants varies from thirties to fifties. Using the California census race/ethnicity data categories as a reference, of the seven participants, three are classified as White Americans, two are classified as Asian Americans, and two are classified as Hispanic and/or Mexican Americans. Of the seven participants, two identified as queer while the rest of the participants did not explicitly share their sexual orientation. It is important to note that the demographic information shared here was not formally collected in a survey; but rather was recorded when professors willingly shared their various identities. It is also important to note that the researcher used pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants. The interviewees all serve as English professors teaching various topics at their university and are thus listed under these pseudonyms: Professor Fresta, Professor Gonzalez, Professor Jeong, Professor Kim, Professor Miller, Professor Navarro, and Professor Sullivan.

All professors have worked at various institutions and reference experiences primarily from their current institution; however, the open-ended research questions also allowed professors room to share experiences throughout their teaching careers. All professors shared that pushback from students was rare and that these situations likely occurred because the topic in question either “hit too close to home” or challenged students to view topics in a

different light than they have before. In smaller instances of pushback, the teachers I interviewed shared their teaching practices that help them get students to trust them and their process. All seven female-identified faculty that I interviewed agreed that dialogic teaching—the facilitation of dialogue and building of ideas between teacher and student—was their go-to critical pedagogical teaching method. The teachers shared that they rely heavily on questioning methods to encourage students to share their experiences regarding various readings or projects.

One teacher gives examples of the kinds of questions she poses to students in her class: “Where are you at with these readings? What resonates with you? What clicks with you? What makes sense? What questions do you have? What’s confusing, frustrating, or doesn’t make sense?” (Sullivan). Professor Sullivan tries to gauge where students are at and have them lead the conversation about the readings—a strategy that is at the heart of dialogic teaching. Along with dialogic teaching, most teachers blend this method with more tangible, or applicable social-justice oriented projects. Most of the teachers I interviewed discussed the importance of situating students’ experience with critical topics in a way that inspires them or encourages them to take a stance on a particular issue. These included awareness of intersectionality, literacy studies, prison education studies, and topics discussing language, knowledge, and power.

Along with different types of teaching and critical topics, the interviews I conducted had recurring themes and areas of focus. First and foremost, all teachers emphasized the importance of a student-centered classroom where students primarily share their personal experiences in relation to theoretical concepts or critical topics. Throughout my research, I also noticed that all teachers heavily focused on their positionality in the classroom and how their openness cultivated an environment of nuance, care, and mutual understanding with students. There was also a focus on gendered discussion dynamics both on a student-student level and a student-teacher level and how these dynamics play a part in institutional misogyny. In addition to themes regarding gendered discussion dynamics in the classroom, there was also a focus on the pushback teachers received from students or fellow faculty members regarding their pedagogical practices and how these teachers navigated this tension. Lastly, teachers shared their teaching practices they use to mitigate tense situations or to encourage critical consciousness or student growth.

Student-Centered Classroom

The general consensus that all interviewees shared throughout their interviews was the idea of letting the students take the reins in discussion and having them share personal experiences as long as they felt comfortable to do so. Professor Miller describes the importance of departing from lecture-based ideologies: “I don't want the class to be just me explaining what these brilliant theorists are saying. I want students to feel empowered and to theorize from

their own experience and recognize that their personal experience and beliefs have a theory" (Miller). Professor Miller, like the other interviewees, prefers to depart from a teacher-centered classroom and finds that co-construction of knowledge and disclosure of personal experiences (if students feel safe to do so) is the way to get students to a place of critical consciousness or self-reflection. Miller also contests the idea that theory is most important and argues that student experience itself can be held in high esteem like theoretical concepts usually are.

Professor Miller outlines the importance of situating students in personal experiences or drawing from something they can relate to in order to make sense of theoretical concepts. Here, Miller talks about a literary theory class she teaches where she breaks down Judith Butler's article "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" where Butler posits that drag destabilizes the gender binary:

> There are sometimes where I lecture a little bit like, 'What on Earth does Judith Butler mean?' But then we turn to [students'] own experiences with drag: Have you ever been to a drag show? What was that like? What are the gender expectations in your families? I tried to model that sense of not saying that there's this theory in this 'Ivory Tower' and that we have to bow before them; but rather that we're all in conversation about the theory instead of just passive learners in front of it. (Miller)

Although Miller finds that contextualizing a theorist is important, she finds that situating a theory in student experience is especially essential. The heart of

critical pedagogy is to model a student-centered classroom, but Miller goes even further than that—she creates a space where she not only learns from students, she recognizes the role the academy plays in education and tries to distance herself from these expectations and instead focuses on student experience.

Professor Navarro shares how she cultivates a student-centered classroom by creating a comprehensive podcast with her students:

> I create a podcast and every podcast, students contribute their voices and sometimes I have conversations with them, or they have conversations with each other, or they just speak on their own and post discussion questions just as they used to do in the classroom. But I really want our discussions to be led by them. I want them to be thinking of the questions that interest them. I want them to be thinking about the reading from their own perspective. (Navarro)

Professor Navarro grounds her work in student-led discussion instead of lecturing. Navarro also finds that during the course of the pandemic, using a multimodal method of discussion besides Zoom was a way for students to get excited about and learn from each other's perspectives. Navarro, like Miller, moves away from the traditional or expected modes of teaching like lecturing or online discussion boards on Blackboard, instead opting for a more cooperative, engaging form of discussion foregrounded in students' personal experience.

Positionality in the Classroom

While sharing personal experiences in the classroom is important, being aware of one's positionality and privileges within the classroom is especially essential for teachers. This awareness is integral to how students view their professors and informs on how students may react when tackling critical topics that may challenge or uproot their worldviews. For example, Professor Sullivan shares the importance of student-led discussions and how it is wrong to assume students' various worldviews or identities:

> Part of the reason why I do this in a student-led way is that messing with people's worldviews is a very tricky thing. I don't like to go into a classroom and assume what my students' worldviews are. I don't have to go in and assume that students have problematic worldviews because often they don't. We all have unexamined perspectives. (Sullivan)

Professor Sullivan unearths a very important aspect of critical pedagogy: identifying sites of oppression without humiliating or attacking the student for having a particular worldview. Sullivan doesn't assume any student's subject position because it is frankly wrong and essentializing to do so. Instead, Sullivan broaches critical topics or particular worldviews by situating herself and her students in a space of learning and growth. Professor Sullivan reminds teachers and students to be aware of their unexamined perspectives without projecting these perspectives or assumptions on one another because that wouldn't be conducive to growth and understanding of particular worldviews.

In addition to this, Professor Sullivan also reflects on her positionality and her experience teaching in minority-serving institutions:

> As a female-identified person in society, I'm at a disadvantage, but as a white person; a person of middle class; a person with my education background—although I also identify as queer—there's a lot of privilege that I bring into the classroom. By leading with student questions and experiences rather than foregrounding my own assertions, and by situating it in student experiences, it's kind of a dialogue with figuring out where students are with stuff, where I can pose questions, where they bring insight into a class, where we can build on that and sort of figure it out. (Sullivan)

Professor Sullivan discusses the importance of bringing in her multiple identities into the classroom, recognizing that students also do the same. By being self-aware about her position, Sullivan can anticipate the possible pushback that may occur or the way her privilege might blind herself to her students' various experiences.

A good example of this is when another teacher shares an experience where she got some pushback concerning the discussion of health and diet in lower-class communities. Professor Gonzalez shared data concerning the fact that better quality foods are not as readily accessible or are tangible options in lower-income areas. The students had more of a black-and-white mindset where they argued that health and diet were choices: you choose to eat healthy and you

choose to go to the gym. Professor Gonzalez; however, was pushing students to notice that isn't a universal experience for everyone: "You don't need a gym membership to work out, but can you work out if you're working 60 hours a week?" After some introspection, Gonzalez realized that the reason why students were fighting back is because this issue might be "too close to home" for them, and that discussing and "showing how all these systems work against you can make you feel really powerless." Professor Gonzalez quickly realized her positionality with her students and was able to keep this in mind for future conversations about hard topics and how to approach them.

Professor Jeong shared an eye-opening moment where she was forced to confront her various identities in the classroom when an older, white male student approached her about a grade he got on a paper:

> I was physically tingling with anxiety at that moment and I thought it was a very scary moment in some ways sociologically because there he is: an older, white, smart, male student from a privileged socio-economic background expressing and vocalizing his anger at me. I was supposed to be the one with the power in the class because I'm the professor in the class, but in some ways if we take the two of us outside of the classroom—and just in terms of our demographics—I would have less power than he would have so that was a frightening moment. (Jeong)

Professor Jeong was understandably shaken by this moment because this student confronted her in front of the class, putting her on the spot. Jeong

realizes how her identity is perceived in different spaces and how that affects the various degrees of oppression she may face. It is important to note the various identities at work in this situation as this might have played out differently if Professor Jeong was a white male professor or if the student was of a different race or gender. Had this encounter been outside the classroom like Jeong envisioned, this situation would have likely played out differently for her, perhaps even worse. However, this situation would have likely been the same for the older, white male student as he carries the same amount of privilege both *inside* and *outside* of academic spaces. This situation, although both scary and illuminating, demonstrates the importance of being conscious of all identities in the classroom including one's own.

Professor Navarro shared her experience regarding her positionality in the classroom while a heated discussion was taking place. On the topic of race, one white student wrote in the chat on Zoom, "All white people are assholes." This took Professor Navarro by surprise because she didn't feel like she could respond properly as a woman of color. If she agreed with the student, it would appear as if she was prejudiced or that she looks at white students differently. If she vehemently disagreed, she wouldn't be able to properly explain this complex conversation surrounding race. Professor Navarro shared her thoughts on how she approached this situation:

> If I am a Latina and I say, 'Latinos are a bunch of machistas,' I wouldn't like it if a white teacher came and said, 'That's inappropriate to say.' I

> have to tread very carefully and think about all the different intersectional identities within the classroom and within the students. I had another student immediately take offense to that. He's an older, white student. He was like, 'Well, I don't think I'm an asshole.' I'm thinking to myself this isn't constructive. So, I had to redirect the conversation and asked, 'Where does racism come from? Is it just a white people problem or is it an everybody problem?' Really, it's an everybody problem. (Navarro)

Even though this was an uncomfortable situation that could have devolved rather quickly, Professor Navarro was mindful of her positionality in the classroom, which allows her to also be mindful of the other identities in the classroom. Some teachers would have shut down this comment or conversation immediately without exploring the intricacies of this student's statement. However, Navarro chose to take an empathetic, intersectional approach while also calling into account the discourse at hand.

Gendered Discussion Dynamics

Regarding the gendered dynamics in the classroom, Professor Navarro recalled a conversation her students were having about feminism and how all the male-identified students were silent and possibly didn't feel like it was their place to speak:

> We were having this great conversation in the discussion section [about feminism], but a lot of the guys were just silent. I wasn't really going to do anything because a lot of my female students are making some great

> points here...then one of my students said, ‘I noticed that the guys in this class have been really quiet during this conversation about feminism.’ She called out our TA. He likes to ask questions. She says, ‘You're always asking questions. Why don't you have an answer? I'm asking you the questions today. What do you think about this feminism in the archive?’ He was put on the spot and he had to say something and that got the other guys talking so sometimes my students make it really easy for me. (Navarro)

Professor Navarro made it clear that generally speaking, even though there are more female-identified students in the classroom than there are male-identified students, the male-identified students sometimes dominate the discussion. However, in this case, she was surprised by this inversion of events and decided to let it play out for a little while. Navarro was also pleasantly surprised that her female-identified students felt comfortable enough to *call in* or bring attention to the male-identified students to speak so that the teacher didn’t have to intervene. Regardless of how this discussion dynamic played out, Professor Navarro makes it clear that, “It doesn't matter if it's more men or women in the room—or non-binary people—it doesn't matter what the makeup of the classroom is; I want those folks who are underrepresented to be able to step up and talk.” Being aware of the discussion dynamics in the classroom is incredibly important. Teachers need to be able to discern whether a particular student group is

dominating the conversation and making others feel left out or to keep tabs on students if they are attacking one another or saying problematic things.

Some female-identified teachers have had uncomfortable experiences with male-identified students asserting their power or unnecessarily pushing boundaries regarding questions about grading or the syllabus. Professor Kim shared two different experiences regarding the topic of demanding students:

> I had a student who would come in after class and put all of this stuff down on the table and stand very close to me and demand things. 'I need feedback on this paper and I need it soon. When are you going to get this back to me?' It felt like there was a gendered dynamic there... I've also had male-identifying students try to pin me down on things. Like, 'You said this is due this day and you changed that, and this is not acceptable.' My strategy is just saying, 'Here's why I did those things, and if you were concerned about that change because you feel like it's unfair, we can talk about what that might look like.' Male-identifying students, if willing or eager to get the credit they feel like they deserve, will push on that. I was trying to revert back to the language of 'We are human and we need to come at each other like humans.' (Kim)

Although it is possible to have demanding students regardless of gender, race, identity, or class—generally speaking—male-identified students feel more comfortable speaking up about what they demand, and it is likely they feel even more comfortable doing so with a female-identified teacher. It is common for

students to misunderstand or have disagreements with the syllabus or the general layout of the class, but these disagreements shouldn't manifest themselves through intimidation or questioning the professor's authority. Professor Kim—although shaken by these experiences—redirects this behavior and takes a more empathetic and affective approach, encouraging these students in question to be mindful of their positionality and how they should treat others.

Navigating Student Pushback

When discussing pushback that teachers have faced in the classroom, several teachers I interviewed shared particular hot-button issues that riled up some students. Professor Navarro shared her experience when she brought up the many facets of feminism:

> Feminism looks like a lot of different things and there's a lot of disagreements within feminism. Can there be a Muslim feminist? You have these French feminists that want to 'liberate' Muslim women from wearing the hijab. Some of my students were very uncomfortable in terms of me telling them that feminism doesn't look like one thing. It's a community. It's a big concept like democracy and sometimes when you don't give students a definition that can fit on their flash card, they get really resistant. (Navarro)

In this particular case, the students had trouble buying into the idea that feminism can take shape in many different ways, including aspects that may seem to be on

the surface, contradictory to them. Professor Navarro was trying to "nuance their understanding of feminism and big concepts," but the students weren't having it. One student in particular, called Navarro out saying, "You don't know what feminism really is," which forced Professor Navarro to defend her credentials and expertise on the topic when she didn't need to in the first place. This was a frustrating experience for Professor Navarro, but it isn't uncommon for female-identified teachers to experience.

Professor Navarro aptly identifies that some students aren't ready to engage in particular discourses, either through lack of exposure or an unwillingness to explore various topics. On a smaller scale, Professor Sullivan echoes Professor Navarro's experiences with situations like these when she taught at a HBCU:

> Some students were international students from various countries in Africa, some were from the diaspora of the Caribbean-Americas, most students were local African American students. Some of the students were really resisting the idea that racism is still a part of our lives. They viewed the kinds of racism that we were reading about in these novels as historical artifacts. That really caught me off guard. (Sullivan)

In this exchange, the students didn't feel like racism was an ongoing or continuous factor in their lives, and it was hard for Professor Sullivan—a white, middle-class woman—to convince them otherwise when that is not exactly how these students felt. While this situation was not one of student pushback per se,

it did force Professor Sullivan to critically examine the positionality of all the students in her classroom in relation to the way Americans view racism. Professor Sullivan sees this as a situation where “young people don’t want to be disconcerted by the world in that way because we want to believe the world is a good place and that these barriers are broken.” Some teachers may have pushed the issue trying to force these students to see their side, but Professor Sullivan didn’t think that approach would get anywhere and would likely traumatize students instead. While Professor Navarro’s experience with teaching students about the existence of Muslim feminists is slightly different than Professor Sullivan’s exchange with students here, both situations show a resistance to ideas that students aren’t accustomed to or intimately familiar with and how these teachers confront these rare occurrences.

Similar to Navarro, Professor Kim also shares her experience when her credentials were questioned by students who also didn’t think she knew what she was doing: “I had students a couple weeks in go, ‘I have no idea what’s going on in this class and I don’t think you do either.’” Kim was questioned because the students felt unsure about the direction the class was headed. Sometimes it is the case that students internalize the structural system of education, confining them to what they think they should be learning and how they should be learning particular topics.

While most teachers who engage in critical pedagogy face pushback from students regarding particular topics, sometimes it is the case that students resist

various teaching methods or materials brought into the classroom. Professor Gonzalez shares her experience of incorporating Spanish in her classroom and how a student resisted this mode of communication or expression:

> I had a student say, 'Can you just stop speaking Spanish in class?' And I said, 'Why?' He said, 'I'm so sick and tired of Spanish. I have to hear it from all these people at my job.' He works at a retail job where he speaks Spanish, but he's not a native Spanish speaker or isn't tied to Spanish in any cultural way; it's just a second language he learned. He has to wear this pin that says 'I speak Spanish' at his job so people would come up to him who did not speak English. And he went on this tangent about people not speaking English and how he's tired of hearing it and he didn't need to hear it in the classroom too. It really hurt and I just sort of changed the subject. (Gonzalez)

Professor Gonzalez was taken aback by this experience, not only on a personal scale, but on behalf of all multilingual students in the classroom who may feel more comfortable when she incorporates Spanish in the classroom. This student didn't feel like there was room for Spanish in academia, while Professor Gonzalez thought it was necessary to include, especially in predominately Hispanic-serving institutions. This situation unfortunately left Gonzalez feeling shaken because she felt, even unintentionally, that "there was a casual racism to it and it made me feel really vulnerable. So, after that I was like, 'Okay I'm not going to bring that into the class anymore.'" Instances of pushback like this, no

matter how big or small, can leave teachers feeling unsure of what to do and may make them question their methods.

Some teachers, understandably, are taken aback when the classroom space gets heated and use more subtle techniques to deescalate situations. Professor Fresta, for example, models a diplomatic classroom environment and leads with the topic of emotions: “I’ll say something like, ‘Okay. Our emotions are getting the best of us. Let's pause for a second.’ Or sometimes what I'll say is, ‘Let's do some writing.’ And so, it can allow people to cool down.” Even though Professor Fresta admits she doesn’t like conflict, she acknowledges that emotions sometimes run high in the classroom and channeling emotions in a therapeutic activity like journaling can be a strategy to help cool things down. This acknowledgment of feelings—through journaling—though seemingly simple, is very important; it stresses the much-needed attention to emotional regulation and giving students a space to do so safely. Hashing out an argument the old-fashioned way often leaves students feeling uncomfortable, unsafe, and unheard which is why professors like Fresta choose a different approach.

Similar to Professor Fresta’s approach, Professor Jeong also deals with student pushback more subtly, choosing to pick her battles in acknowledging problematic issues or behaviors. Professor Jeong had a grammar class where students had to come up with their own writing example. In this example, one student wrote: “‘It is obvious that the teacher hates black men.’” Professor Jeong felt like this was directed at her, but “did not engage or talk with the student about

it. It was a correct grammar example so I gave them full points and didn't make any comments on it." It is hard to say whether this student said these comments because he really felt like he was being mistreated or if it was some form of retaliation for not liking the class or a grade he received. Regardless of the reason, Jeong felt like this situation wasn't one that needed to be explicitly acknowledged and instead used this situation as a learning experience to be mindful of her and her students' identities in the classroom. Sometimes it is the case that students find creative ways to make their voices heard—respectfully or not—and this professor chose to avoid this conflict, relinquish any defensive feelings she may have had, and instead reflect on any implicit biases she may have had or internalized.

Navigating Departmental or Colleague Pushback

In conjunction with student pushback, some female-identified teachers also face pushback or undue criticism from fellow colleagues regarding their pedagogical practices. Although most of the female-identified teachers I interviewed shared mostly positive experiences with fellow faculty regarding pedagogical practices, some shared instances where they felt like they weren't being fully supported the way they should like Martin did. Professor Fresta shares her experience when she approached her program director for advice about how to deal with an unruly student:

> When I was having particular difficulties with this one student, I went to our program director who was like, 'I'm always here to help talk through

> things.' I was talking about the way that this student was being super disruptive and was just being so out of line and how much he kind of scared me and made me not want to teach. And instead of just acknowledging that his behavior was unacceptable and figuring out ways to kind of get around that, the program director was like, 'Well, he just sounds like a reluctant learner. How can we make the space better for him?' (Fresta)

This disheartening experience left Professor Fresta feeling under-supported and unheard. The intentional dismissal of her feelings and redirection of the issue from the program advisor made Fresta feel like this situation was clearly gendered: "It's not about [the fact that the student is a reluctant learner] because I know he wouldn't treat a fifty-year old man like this." Although Professor Fresta reassured that she has never had an experience like this at her current university, this experience, nevertheless, impacted her negatively at the time and made her feel like she had no control over her classroom or support from those who are supposed to support her.

Professor Kim shared her experience regarding a colleague questioning her pedagogical choices, disagreeing with a text she was teaching her students:

> I was teaching a text about how 'All learning is violence;' that learning is a violent process. One of my colleagues took issue with that and was like, 'Learning is not violent—what we do in class is not violent.' Some of the things I want to challenge are threatening to our institution and our

> careers. For me I'm okay with that…But I think when you come into a classroom and say things like 'all learning involves a measure of violence,' that can be scary for students and that can be even scarier for colleagues that believe differently about what this work is and what it means. (Kim)

Professor Kim realizes that the text she chooses to teach students can be considered controversial or unusual to other colleagues as well as students. However, as a critical feminist pedagogue, she defends her teaching practices and chosen texts because she realizes the importance of her work. Part of being a critical pedagogue is challenging students or teaching texts that are "outside the box" so that students can view discourses from a variety of perspectives. Kim's self-awareness of the possible pushback or criticism she may receive prepares her for these tough conversations that she will have with students.

In addition to dismissal and questioning of pedagogical practices, Professor Navarro shared her personal experience as a graduate student, where she was silenced at an academic conference for asking questions regarding race and feminism:

> Someone would be giving a presentation and I would ask a question related to gender or related to race and I would literally be told, 'That's not what this conversation is about.' Then the person in charge tells the presenter, 'You don't have to answer that question.' Like, it's a waste of time for them to answer my stupid question about gender. I got a lot of

> that from faculty when I was in graduate school. It was not at all a friendly environment as a woman of color, not at all. (Navarro)

Colloquiums are a space for fellow academics to learn and engage with each other's work, but this negative experience made her feel like her voice was not welcome, especially as a woman of color. Even though this emotionally-wrought experience occurred when she was a graduate student, Professor Navarro internalized this experience and carried it with her in her teaching career.

Essentially, the experiences that many critical feminist scholars and the interviewees share are ones that are familiar to many female-identified teachers, especially for those who engage in critical pedagogy. Early in the scholarship of critical pedagogy, they all noticed that their way of teaching didn't *mesh* well with male-identified students, or at times, with their fellow male-identified colleagues. The point of teaching critical pedagogy is for students to face their own biases, privileges, or ways they may be knowingly or unknowingly advancing the dominant discourses that pervade in society.

When the male-identified students in Brookes and Kelly's article were learning about a character's misogyny in the novel they were working on, they vehemently disagreed with Brookes, arguing that the male character wasn't being misogynistic. Without full context, it is hard to know whether those male-identified students were projecting their anger at Brookes because they themselves have said similar things to a woman before. Regardless, Brookes and Kelly were met with resistance from several male-identified students in their

classroom, which made the classroom an uncomfortable space to navigate, and leaving them unsure of what to do next. A similar disagreement with Martin and several interviewees had with their male-identified colleagues also made them feel shaky in their pedagogical practices and left them questioning what they could have been doing wrong. These teachers, although devastated and disheartened by their experiences, shared their vulnerable experiences in a time where most female-identified teachers wouldn't and essentially paved the way for current teachers in the field to feel comfortable enough to use their power and authority in the classroom.

Critical-Feminist Teaching Practices from Teachers in the Field

Most of the teachers I interviewed shared different ways they would redirect student behavior, either through modeling or by allowing students to redirect conversations themselves. For instance, Professor Miller shares her values in modeling democratic discussion using a *call-in* method regarding dominant discourses: "The idea is to take the ideas away from an individual student and put them on the board. So, it's not like, 'Jim you're saying…' but rather, what I hear Jim saying is…' this is an idea people have in our culture right now' and put that idea up on the board." Here, Professor Miller takes the attention away from the student and their possible problematic idea, and redirects the students' attention to the discourse or idea at play, encouraging students to analyze that instead.

In the same vein of calling in a particular discourse, Professor Miller also recognizes the importance of "going 'meta' at different points of the semester—not while it's happening…to talk about the fact that certain voices or certain people feel more privileged or confident because of their privilege and it's important to hear from everyone." *Calling in* a discourse serves as a way for teachers to address the problem immediately in the classroom, while going *meta* at different points in the semester leaves room for heated discussions to die down before addressing them. Both of these tactics serve as a way to confront these issues depending on a teacher's style and preference.

Professor Gonzalez shares her tactic of addressing possible problematic beliefs students share in their writing and how to navigate these situations when they happen. Gonzalez described an early teaching experience where she would give students an open prompt and quickly realized that students took advantage of this or used the open prompt as an excuse to talk about issues that were verging on problematic or inappropriate. To stave off this kind of issue, Gonzalez uses proposals as a prerequisite for any writing assignment so she knows what students will potentially write about ahead of time. Professor Gonzalez shared one instance where a student wanted to make an argument against feminism:

> I had one student who was going to interview a feminist to prove her wrong and it's like, 'No you can't do that.' First of all, it's totally unethical. It gets at that whole spectacle that we have of news where people

> interview others without any real sense of questions, but rather to get some viral clip...If the student said for example, ‘Feminism is flawed in X ways,’ I would be like, ‘Yeah that's great.’ But if it's just a certain opinion that they're not willing to look into anything else and want to make a spectacle of it, then I can say it doesn't actually fit into our prompt and what we’re writing about. (Gonzalez)

Not only did Professor Gonzalez find that project proposals helped her navigate possible inappropriate topics, she also found that this method helped her students solidify their ideas and air out any concerns or questions they had before writing the paper. While this professor uses project proposals as a screening tool for student ideas, project proposals can be adapted in many ways to suit the type of project or qualities that the teacher is looking for in said project.

While all interviewees shared that they don’t like to deal with student conflict, they know it is necessary when a student accidentally says something offensive or disparaging about marginalized groups or communities. Professor Kim shares her way of broaching the topic:

> If a student were to say something that might come off as ableist, I might say, ‘I'm interested in what you’re saying; one way of hearing that might be that you are suggesting that... But I don’t think that’s what you mean, correct me if I’m wrong.’ It’s a face-saving way of inviting a revision; sometimes we say things that aren’t right. Especially when we’re working through hard topics and we are trying new ideas out. I talk in my

> classroom about how we are a community and we are responsible to one another. So, we have to take responsibility for the things we say. (Kim)

Rather than call out the student and put them on the spot, Professor Kim delves into what this student is trying to say and gives them a way to name it. Being that our society is constantly evolving in terms of culturally responsive issues, it is not unusual for some students to be uninformed about particular issues. While it may be some teacher's or fellow student's gut reaction to tear apart a problematic thing a student is saying, this approach is insensitive and can hamper any student learning and growth that can potentially occur. Professor Kim is intimately aware of the trial and error involved in learning new discourses and finds that patiently working through the concepts with a student is the best way to approach unintentional offensive remarks.

Because dialogical teaching encourages students to do some of the heavy lifting in the classroom, it is not uncommon for there to be instances where students not only get into heated discussions, but become the interveners in said discussions. Several teachers shared their experiences where students will feel confident *calling in* other students for their problematic or insensitive views. Professor Jeong, in particular, when talking about the sociolinguistic concept of "crossing"—where individuals mimic other group's speech—let students take the reins in discussing this topic:

> This young woman, she said, 'Why is it that people get so offended and bent-out-of-shape with this crossing? It's the biggest compliment if you

> imitate somebody.' And then some brave student—I think very respectfully and firmly—shared out loud verbally in class that it's also cultural appropriation. And the history is that people have often done that with more negative intentions, not to give compliments to that culture. (Jeong)

Professor Jeong, although understanding where this student was coming from, relinquished her control of the classroom and let other students share their opinions. The student who gave a different frame of reference of crossing for the other student shows the dialogical teaching method at work. This student didn't attack the other student for having different, verging on problematic beliefs; rather this student pointed out the problematic discourse at hand and tried to be a voice for those who were too afraid to speak up.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research

Blending already existing pedagogical approaches, but filtering them through an intersectional feminist lens of self-reflection and affective teaching allows female-identified teachers to navigate the troubling waters of critical pedagogy with a little more confidence. Drawing on the various frameworks from critical feminist scholars can give teachers an idea of how they can shape their classroom environment in a more effective way when dealing with critical topics. Realistically, there will always be pushback from students when teachers engage with critical pedagogy in the classroom, but it is important to not let those experiences consume teachers. Unraveling where those feelings are coming

from and helping students sort out their anger or distrust in a safe environment can aid in personal growth and can help them understand their emotions in a much healthier way. Utilizing critical pedagogy through intersectional-feminist approaches allows students to tap into those emotions that they are afraid will surface and can provide much needed healing.

The institutionalized misogyny and the lack of critical consciousness from male-identified students and male-identified colleagues make it hard for female-identified teachers to want to speak up or to continue engaging with critical pedagogy. Perhaps a way to mitigate this fear is to understand why male-identified students and colleagues fight back in the first place. Engaging in critical topics forces students to push the envelope and critically understand why they think the way they think. Instead of female-identified teachers feeling discouraged or frustrated by the pushback they get from male-identified students, maybe understanding that such an upheaval of emotion and confronting one's worldview realizing it needs to change or be critically examined is an integral part of this emotionally-wrought process. No one likes their views to be challenged because it uproots everything they know about the world and what is familiar to them. The best way to approach the uncomfortable space that students feel is to embrace it head on and to co-construct boundaries in the class where everyone's voices can be heard or expressed, while also acknowledging that not every view is tolerable or "right."

When conversing with several female-identified professors, we uncovered together what we thought was at the core of feminist critical pedagogy, and how female-identified colleagues' perspectives might differ from male-identified colleagues. In our conversation, we identified a trend that male-identified teachers tend to view critical pedagogy as more procedural or goal-oriented, while female-identified teachers view critical pedagogy as a practice that is ever-changing and focuses mainly on the critical consciousness and personal experiences of students. The interviewees and I may be alone in our structural view of critical pedagogy, but there is some merit to our analysis. Female-identified teachers do have a tendency to focus on the affective part of teaching and the relationship between students and teachers, whereas male-identified teachers do seem to focus more heavily on a particular end goal with this teaching philosophy.

Whether our personal experiences can offer insight on the gendered nature of critical pedagogy is unclear. What our viewpoints, like the other narratives in this paper do offer, however, is a re-imagining of critical pedagogy where critical consciousness and self-reflection are the focus, and where female-identified teachers can feel confident to carry out their teaching practices in whatever form they may take. Perhaps the way to unweave this complicated web of institutionalized misogyny within critical pedagogy is as simple as helping students get to a place of critical consciousness and reflection, to realize that critical pedagogy is always ever-changing and in constant revision, and that

teachers should view student learning as an emotionally-involved process, not a list to conveniently check off or a goal to achieve.

The professors interviewed in this study were a limited sample and cannot fully encompass the nuances of the gendered dynamics in critical pedagogy. Although this limited data sample was fairly diverse in terms of the various identities of the participants, there is much more work to be done regarding institutional restraints and implications, diversifying curricula and practices, and other intersectional approaches to this teaching philosophy. There are obvious and glaring limitations of this study that I would like to address: 1) Much of the discussion in this paper generally speaks to not only institutionalized misogyny, but in particular, discussion of more dominant groups, their privilege, and how their privilege affects student-teacher dynamics, such as white, male-identified teachers. An exploration of the gendered and intersectional dynamics of this teaching philosophy regarding male-identified teachers of color or queer male-identified teachers would greatly extend this conversation and complement the narratives in this paper. 2) Additionally, there has been no discussion about the experiences of gender-nonconforming, non-binary, or non-cisgender teachers—and to my knowledge—is a glaring gap in the research and warrants future study and attention. Given the fact that the critical-intersectional feminist scholarship and interview narratives shared in this paper identified positionality to be a crucial component both inside and outside of the classroom, I find these suggestions for

future research essential and arguably imperative in advancing the theoretical progression of critical pedagogy.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT LETTER

CSUSB

WE DEFINE THE *Future*

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO
5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407
www.csusb.edu

Hello,

My name is ToniAnne Erickson, and I am a graduate student at California State University, San Bernardino.

I want to interview female-identified professors and gather their experiences in the classroom when engaging in antiracist teaching or social justice teaching that challenges students to confront their biases. My hope is to gather meaningful data regarding ways to mitigate possible gendered power dynamics in the classroom when female-identified professors teach these topics and to develop an intersectional perspective on critical pedagogy. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

If you choose to participate in interviews, we will meet via Zoom for one interview (about 60-90 minutes long). After I begin analysis, I may contact you for a follow-up interview, which is completely voluntary. With your consent, interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recording device or through Zoom's recording features.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You do not have to answer any question(s) you do not want to answer. Information about you and your participation in this study will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage.

I do not anticipate any risk in your participation in this study, other than you may become uncomfortable answering some of the questions about your experiences with (possible) pushback from students in the classroom. While I cannot promise you any direct benefit from your participation in this study, your participation in this study may offer a refreshed or enlightened perspective on critical pedagogy; a field which arguably needs new and diverse voices and perspectives.

Please feel free to forward this to others you know might be interested in participating (preferably in the English department).

If you have questions about this study before or after your participation, please contact me: ToniAnne Erickson, graduate student at California State University, San Bernardino; Phone: (909) 238-0729; Email: erict300@coyote.csusb.edu

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, please contact the IRB Compliance Coordinator, Michael Gillespie, in the Office of Academic Research at (909) 537-7588 or mgillesp@csusb.edu

Thank you,

ToniAnne Erickson

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Barriers in Critical Pedagogy

ToniAnne Erickson

Interview Questions

1. How would you personally define critical pedagogy?
2. What has your experience been like as a female-identifying teacher who engages in critical pedagogy?
3. What are some of the practices you use or critical topics you like to focus on/teach?
4. Have you faced any pushback/resistance from students or colleagues regarding your pedagogical practices?
5. How do you address gender inequalities if/when they happen in the classroom?
6. What scholarship has influenced your thinking about critical pedagogy?

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

CSUSB

WE DEFINE THE *Future*

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO
5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407
www.csusb.edu

February 3, 2021

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Expedited Review
IRB-FY2021-170
Status: Approved

Prof. Alexandra Cavallaro and Ms. ToniAnne Erickson
CAL - English
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Prof. Cavallaro and Ms. Erickson:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Gendered Barriers in Critical Pedagogy" has been reviewed and reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk and benefits of the study except to ensure the protection of human participants. Important Note: This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Visit the Office of Academic Research website for more information at https://www.csusb.edu/academic-research.

The study is approved as of February 3, 2021. The study will require an annual administrative check-in (annual report) on the current status of the study on February 3, 2022. Please use the renewal form to complete the annual report.

If your study is closed to enrollment, the data has been de-identified, and you're only analyzing the data - you may close the study by submitting the Closure Application Form through the Cayuse IRB system. Please note the Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study. Please note a lapse in your approval may result in your not being able to use the data collected during the lapse in your approval.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission Webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action.

- Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.
- Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implementing in your study.
- Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events experienced by subjects during your research.
- Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risks and benefits to the human participants in your IRB application. If you have any questions about the IRBs decision please contact Michael Gillespie, the IRB Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2021-170 in all correspondence. Any complaints you receive regarding your research from participants or others should be directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Nicole Dabbs

Nicole Dabbs, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board
ND/MG

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