

Journal of Communication Pedagogy

2018, Vol. 1(1) 40-51

© The Author(s) 2018

Reprints and permissions: <http://www.ccsa-net.org>

DOI: 10.31446/JCP.2018.09

Central States Communication Association

Privileged Pedagogy, Vulnerable Voice: Opening Feminist Doors in the Communication Classroom

Danielle M. Stern

Abstract: This interview study analyzes 22 communication scholars' experiences of teaching about feminism. Beyond questioning understandings of feminism in the communication classroom, a theory of privileged vulnerability emerged regarding the privilege of teaching about feminism and the vulnerability we--as self-identified feminist educators--embody via this privilege. Implications include recognizing our privileges and vulnerabilities, as well as how they relate to student interactions, to enact a reflexive, embodied pedagogical praxis.

Ten years. The amount of time at my current institution. Sixteen years. The length of my teaching career since I first stepped into a communication classroom teaching news writing in the Midwest as a second-year master's student. Just one year prior, my thesis advisor introduced me to the works of Friere (2000), Giroux (1994), and hooks (1994), who provided the terminology and examples of a liberatory, critical pedagogy. As a twentysomething woman questioning her sexuality amidst a slow burn of feminist, social justice awakening, I had never felt more vulnerable than I did standing outside that classroom doorway. My heart raced. My throat tightened. My hands shook. I wanted to vomit. Instead, I took a deep breath and gently nudged open the door.

The metaphor of *opening the door* fits the vision of feminist pedagogy, which is informed by a critical approach that opens a line of questioning power dynamics at the structural and interpersonal levels. Following a tradition of social justice-oriented critical pedagogy that transforms "oppressive educational institutions into sites of emancipation and equality" (Allen,

Danielle M. Stern, Department of Communication, Christopher Newport University, Newport News, VA.

CONTACT: Danielle M. Stern danielle.stern@cnu.edu

The author would like to thank Michael Willits and Caroline Herodet for their assistance in the research process; Scott Myers and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive revision suggestions; and the Christopher Newport University Faculty Senate for a Faculty Development Grant and sabbatical release time to conduct this study.

2011, p. 104), feminism interrupts and intervenes. Fassett and Warren (2007) introduced the concept of critical communication pedagogy (CCP) specifically to interrogate power dynamics within *and* about the communication classroom. The explicit connections of critical communication pedagogy to identity, ideology, and multiple ways of knowing transformed the way scholars of communication education practiced and researched our craft. CCP disrupted the dominant paradigm of studying best practices and effective teaching.

Those of us who infuse feminism that questions structural hierarchies in our institutions and everyday lives into our already critical pedagogy across the communication discipline found a theoretical framework in CCP that informed our existing praxis. According to Warren (2001), research about critical communication pedagogy encourages us “to name the practices that promote effective learning that is centered in critical, embodied, and liberatory theory” (p. 32). For my predecessors, peers, and now my students, many of us likely first read about this lens via the work of bell hooks (1994), who explained that the “privileged act of naming often affords those in power access to modes of communication” (p. 62). The ways in which scholars of feminist pedagogy and communication pedagogy name these pedagogical acts matter. Scholars have continued to produce CCP scholarship, especially in areas of the body and identity (Kahl, 2013; Lindemann, 2011; Rudick, 2017; Stern, 2011; Warren, 2008) that draw from a variety of feminist, queer, race, (dis)ability, and other critical communication frameworks.

A primary area where critical communication pedagogy intersects with feminist principles of voice and empowerment is vulnerability. Scholars (Dannels et al., 2014; Rodriguez, 2010; Warren, 2008) have stressed the need to understand vulnerability as an empowering pedagogical praxis. Vulnerable, feminist CCP leads to storytelling that unites us. Feminism is “something that one does” (Stephenson-Abetz, 2012, p. 103), similar to the way hooks (2000) described feminist movement as organized action rather than as a noun. It is impossible to separate feminism and performance of that identity/movement because the two are linked in a “body that lives feminism” (Stern, 2011, p. 251). Moreover, our feminist pedagogical bodies are sites of knowledge production, both in the classroom and in our spoken or written stories of those experiences. The feminist action of teaching is an embodied process that is enhanced only through our shared stories of feminist pedagogy. As Stern (2015) argued, “The writing process inscribes feminism on both the page and [our] identity” (p. 99). When we name our teaching practices as feminist, we face backlash at all levels of our educational institutions, including from our students, which charges feminist communication and media scholars “to document resistance to feminist pedagogies” (Eaton, 2001, p. 391). In turn, I set out to research how students not only resist feminist pedagogies, but also how students respond favorably to the same praxis. My research was guided by the following question:

RQ: How have experiences of teaching about feminism and gender shaped the pedagogical identity of communication scholars?

Methods

Participants

Participants were 22 communication instructors (18 women and 4 men whose ages ranged from their 20s to their 60s) representing the Communication sub-disciplines of health, identity, intercultural, interpersonal, media, organizational, performance studies, public relations, and rhetoric. They included one adjunct professor, eight tenure-track assistant professors, eight tenured associate professors, four tenured full professors, and one doctoral student. Four participants also were administrators (e.g., program chairs or directors). Participants were primarily white, cisgender American citizens, but also included two women of color (one African American and one Asian American), two international scholars of color from Congo and Turkey, and two queer women and two gay men. Collectively, the participants taught in 13 states across the continental United States.

Procedures

Following approval from my university's Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited via public posts to my personal Facebook account and to various Facebook groups and listservs for national and regional academic organizations. The only inclusion criterion for participation in this study was experience teaching about gender and/or feminism in the communication discipline. From Fall 2016 to Spring 2017, I conducted and audio recorded 16 individual interviews and one group interview of six participants at conference hotels that coincided with annual communication association conventions to maximize the geographic reach of my participants. These interviews consisted of flexible questions that allowed for guided conversations (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) and specifically elicited stories about teaching feminism, including participants' memories of how students responded to specific discussion and activities, as well as how student responses encouraged faculty to change anything in their lessons or course design and the extent to which the word "feminism" was integral to their pedagogy. All interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, with the average interview lasting one hour. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants. The audio recordings were transcribed, generating nearly 200 single-spaced pages.

Data Analysis

I coded and analyzed the interview transcripts through a lens of constructivist grounded theory. Grounded theory includes strategies of simultaneous data collection and inductive analysis, memo writing, theoretical sampling, and saturation. Constructivist approaches to grounded theory build upon early, objectivist grounded theory in two ways. First, constructive inquiry relies on the reflexive subjectivity of the researcher who recognizes the incomplete, contextual nature of the data; second, it challenges normative assumptions of the phenomenon under study, including the limits of generalizability beyond specific contexts, with the goal of revealing a "collective analytic story" (Charmaz, 2011, p. 364). In line with the reflexivity subjectivity of the researcher, I kept myself close to the data. For example, when I encountered communication exchanges in the data that resonated with my own experiences, I wrote these reactions to revisit later.

The data were coded using open coding and axial coding. Initial open coding began by reading each interview transcription in its entirety two to three times, with each subsequent read-through prompting additional questions and greater clarity. After each round of interviewing, I compared my notes and categories to those of the previous rounds of interviews. During this open coding process, I identified 105 initial categories around feminist pedagogical identity experiences. I followed this continuous open coding process of constant comparison and asking questions (Gray, 2014), as well as reflecting on the extensive notes taken during the interviews to further focus the analysis and guide interpretation during axial coding. Axial coding “identif[ies] the conditions under which their categories emerge, specif[ies] relationships between these categories, and define [s]the consequences” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 362).

Through the axial coding process, I collapsed the original 105 categories to 48 codes that were related to the emerging thematic contexts of privilege and vulnerability. Finally, during the theoretical sampling phase, which calls for comparing axial codes to the research literature, I returned to the CCP literature and other bodies of knowledge until the data appeared saturated and indicative of meaning that would be helpful to the pedagogical practices of other feminist communication instructors. Revisiting the research literature is a critical element of theoretical sampling to determine whether the data relate to existing theoretical models, paying careful attention to not lose the context in which the axial codes emerged (Gray, 2014). Consequently, theoretical sampling illuminated two primary themes of privilege and vulnerability, as well as a secondary theme of feminist naming experiences consistent with the literature (Ahmed, 2017; Eaton, 2001).

Results

The research question asked how experiences of teaching about feminism and gender shape the pedagogical identity of communication scholars. It was found that the experiences of teaching about feminism and gender encompass two primary themes of privilege and vulnerability, as well as a secondary theme involving feminist naming experiences. That is, the participants’ communication classroom experiences produced a pedagogical identity shaped by the privilege of having a space in which to name their feminism, while simultaneously ruminating in the vulnerability that comes with that privilege.

Embodying Privilege

One of the more-salient themes of privilege the participants discussed concerned the physical space of the university for active, reflexive dialogue. The classroom space cultivated a privileged awakening for students. According to Sadie, an assistant professor in the Midwest: “Female students started to see how their mothers didn’t have as much power in the family as their fathers.” This was not the case for all students, but the connection to personal experience and reflecting on families as a system of gender inequality is an important pedagogical tool. To encourage a discussion of gender dynamics in non-heterosexual families, Sadie screened an HBO documentary that interviewed same-sex couples that she said her students responded favorably to: “A lot of students realize[d] that just because the gender of the parents were the same, the family struggles mirrored the family struggles that they had in their own families.” Renee, an associate professor who teaches at a university with a large military and veteran student population where 85% of enrollment is males, said her students benefit from a privileged

space to discuss masculinity and the pressures on men to avoid emotional displays, especially those displays of sorrow or affection for other males, including their fathers. Renee, like many of the other participants shared how her women students value her informal mentorship, which likely would not happen if not for the formal teacher/student relationship sanctioned by the university.

Participants recognized the privilege to introduce concepts, theories, and examples outside of students' typical frame of reference. While this introduction did not always fare well, they still appreciated the privilege of trying new and necessary instructional tools and concepts. For example, Renee shared: "When I taught the mass media current events class I had a whole section on Black feminist thought and I cut that out. My students just don't get that second layer of oppression." Renee said she still layers in connections to race, but more subtly rather than via an entire unit. This example is similar to how many participants talked about subversively weaving in feminism and intersectional identity politics into their pedagogy. "I always sneak a little disability in there," Miriam stated, an educator for more than 20 years who also embodies a disability. Heteronormativity and class privilege also were common topics participants were privileged to subvert in various ways. Charlotte, an associate professor in the Midwest, also spoke of her students' risk of an "erasure of difference" when she taught about intersectional approaches to gender. Hannah, an associate professor in the Midwest, acknowledged the privilege of teaching at a private university built around a mission of social justice, where students of color are the majority enrollment. "We are more progressive in terms of education in a lot of ways . . . and part of the reason I don't get a lot of pushback," Hannah said.

However, some participants readily recalled moments of resistance. A few participants identified some of their women students resisting the label of feminism, which was viewed as productive because they believed their students felt comfortable voicing their differing views. The other moments of resistance participants shared was linked to traditionally masculine, often times athletic, male students. One student athlete dropped Ted's class when he could not, according to Ted, an associate professor in the Midwest, come to terms with disrupting the gender binary. Ted stated, "He was just unwilling to relent on [the idea of] women are this, men are this, and he was treating his classmates in a largely discussion based classroom that were not productive for the rest of the class." Incivility was a common example for using the privileged position of faculty member/instructor to end conversation.

Although the majority of participants did not identify active, vocal resistance to teaching about these concepts, a theme of silent resistance or non-engagement emerged. As Gina, an assistant professor on the West Coast, shared, to "sit in the silence of a response" can be an incredibly privileged space of reflection and learning, where often students will speak and begin a dialogue. However, silence also can leave instructors feeling incredibly vulnerable.

Living Vulnerably

The theme of vulnerability primarily surfaced in lived, bodily experiences. This embodiment included performing feminism and gender in families as well as in classrooms. Elizabeth, an assistant professor on the East Coast, specified the body as the site of struggle and posed the critical questions, "How do you do this concept? How does your body enact the words that you are saying, because we are not just talking hands and bodies?" Elizabeth shared that she

constantly challenges herself to be reflexive in how she embodies her positionality of a feminism that is inclusive and intersectional, specifically regarding trans politics. Alicia, a West Coast professor who has been teaching for more than 30 years, shared a story from about 20 years ago when her young daughter left a sticky note on Alicia's computer that read "Spend more time with [daughter's name]." "It broke my heart, but I am willing to tell my students that." Alicia shared this in juxtaposition with a later story about earlier teaching evaluations in which students criticized her for crying in the classroom. "I learned that I had to control my emotions." She was in her early 20s at the time. Despite this experience, Alicia said, "A good feminist teacher is your willingness to be vulnerable."

Other participants shared similar stories of controlling emotions, especially early in their careers. Emotional authenticity, while a vulnerable stance, might work in those educators favor who have certain privileges of gender, sexuality, or tenure. For example, Jack fully acknowledged his privilege to express anger or frustration and discuss feminism and gender with an abandon not characteristic of his women colleagues at his university in the South.

Disciplinary practices carried over into bodily appearance, specifically of gendered expectations of masculine and feminine dress. Ellen, an assistant professor who teaches at a private university, shared an incredibly vulnerable position of women faculty visibly aging in front of students:

Markers of age come into question, like a little bit of weight gain, grey hair, or things like that. I haven't had the chance to fully research it, probably because I personally don't want to, but I just have this sense in my body that I got a lot of positive response and attention from students in part because of being a young and attractive person . . . She's not Hillary Clinton. She's not scowling. She's not shrill because she's young and virile and attractive . . . I'm aging and pre-tenure [and] suddenly feeling fear.

This cultivation of space to explore feminism also extends to acknowledging the vulnerability of others' bodies. Denise, an associate professor and administrator in the Midwest, shared that in the media examples she uses in class to demonstrate course concepts, she is mindful to avoid examples of individuals failing who are members of non-dominant identities as "I try not to have the person giving the bad speech be a minority because I think it reinforces stereotypes." She joked that she picked on the "white man" frequently because that identity category represents a privileged position. Some participants shared similar sentiments in that they have faced more scrutiny for illuminating white male privilege.

At time, the vulnerabilities participants confronted were not their own, but their students. Denise further shared a story about a unit on gendered violence in her interpersonal class where she assigned Olson's (2004) groundbreaking autoethnography about domestic violence. "One of my more participatory students wasn't really participating . . . She came up to me afterward, shaking, and told me, 'This is me,' and then just started to cry." Denise walked over to the office of support services with her student and made sure she was safe going home that night. Denise cried as she described the interaction of hugging her student and receiving a thank you card from the student's mother.

Naming Feminism

Perhaps the most viscerally identified vulnerability the participants shared is the practice of overtly identifying as feminist in the classroom. However, participants recognized the privileged space of their classrooms for this naming practice. Feminist self-identification was contingent on a number of factors, primarily course topic or level of job security. Courses or lessons specifically about gender communication, critical rhetoric, or media criticism led to more feminist identification from participants. Tenured professors and male faculty were more likely to identify as feminists publicly in the space of the classroom more so than non-tenured women faculty. According to Jack, “I am fine with feminism. I label myself as one. I see a lot of people making calls for humanism, but to me that’s just like saying, ‘well, all lives matter’ . . . Embracing and defending feminism is important.”

Most participants aligned with this coalitional politics of uniting around the term and movement of feminism, but recognizing that discussing feminist movement in courses as problematic along lines of privilege and marginality at various points of history. Participants also were in agreement that the traditional wave metaphor was helpful for beginning a conversation about the history of feminist movement, but that the conversation needed to be expanded to be less United States- and Euro-centric. Many participants specifically identified the need to include more nuanced discussions of masculinity and trans-politics for feminism to stay viable as movement, praxis, and theory. Ted established that a new word is not needed for feminism because “sexism and oppression are *not* new phenomenon. They are old phenomena that we continue to adapt in new contexts.”

Mary, an African American communication professor in the South who also teaches in her university’s African American Studies program, claimed feminism as an important label for political movement as a way to remind her students to reclaim those women’s voices that have historically been excluded from Black political theorizing. She highlighted instances of men in the African American community interrogating feminism, stating that “The notion of this feminism, particular for women of color, sometimes gets framed as a betrayal to black men, but one doesn’t have to choose one or the other. You are not turning your back on somebody, just because you are turning some light on you.” This notion of illuminating ideas left in the shadows or not written into history surfaced repeatedly. Similarly, participants identified examples of feeling proud of their pedagogical acts when this illumination process happened for students outside of the classroom space. According to Yvonne, an associate professor at a Midwestern university, “I feel like I have done my job in terms of being a feminist scholar when I have students who are applying what they have learned in the class to critique arguments, and I didn’t have to do or say anything. They did it for me.”

Many participants used a version of the metaphor of “creating space” to articulate a critical feminist pedagogy that disrupts long-held power dynamics inherent in knowledge (re)production. They collectively spoke of the importance of continuing a feminist pedagogical practice rooted in critical communication concepts of language and power. For example, they implicated vocabulary terms such as “community,” “conversation,” “dialogue,” and other instructional tools of shared spaces and conversations as feminist pedagogical values. Participants often cited celebrities such as Emma Watson, Beyonce, Amy Schumer, Lady Gaga,

and Joss Whedon in helping to increase the visibility of feminism as a necessary movement about identity politics.

Sometimes the facilitation of space and language move beyond the obvious popular culture references to more ambiguous feminist labeling practices. As Yvonne shared, “I don’t feel like [I have to] come out as a feminist on the first day of class and say, ‘I’m a feminist’ to practice feminism.” She said she enjoyed the “reveal” later in the semester due to some of her students voicing surprise at her challenging longheld feminist stereotypes. Brian, a gay professor at a private university, also enjoyed playing with assumptions about feminist labels. He offered a story about how a non-traditional, older female student told him on the first night of their gender communication class that she was glad to be taking the class with him because it would not have gone well if she took the course with a feminist. “I was like,” Brian told her, “this is gonna be a bumpy ride, because I am a big old feminist, and we are going to go there.”

Many of the participants acknowledged a widespread stigmatization and demonization of the word feminism, not just by mainstream culture, but also by students. An identity of “I am not a feminist, but . . .” emerged in participants’ classrooms. For example, Yvonne said that one of her students stated, “I am a feminist, but I’d like to be married with kids,” during a class discussion about feminism. Some participants shared that their students acknowledged to them that a feminist identity slowly emerged during the course of a class where faculty had assigned readings about gender, power, masculinity, femininity, and similar concepts. Participants said their students also admitted to not realizing that the term *feminist* had been framed with such derision in the popular press. According to Charlotte, “I approach [teaching feminism] with the assumption that most people are feminist in their beliefs even if they don’t name it as such.” Like many participants, Yvonne articulated feminism as a “working definition” that accounted for an individual to develop a continuum of feminist ideals and praxis even while not self-identifying as a feminist. According to all participants, the facilitation of this definitional process within individual students reverts to the themes of privilege and vulnerability in that feminist faculty must be willing not only to take on the vulnerable position of sharing personal stories of how they come to feminism, but also use their privileged status to expose structural oppression.

In sum, of the 22 participants, only two participants suggested a naming revision might help the feminist pedagogical cause. However, participants who valued the feminist/feminism label stressed that the structural, systemic history of feminist movement cannot be lost; otherwise, the risk of losing political capital increases. As Ellen shared, “I try to take the critical feminist approach from the ‘get go’ and say that every pedagogical act is a political act.” Marcus, a queer international scholar at a private university shared his approach: “Lately, I am defining feminism as this ideological standpoint that constructs, reconstructs, interrogates, and re-interrogates the idea of identity and how much of identity is political, social, cultural, and economically driven.”

Discussion

The themes that emerged contribute to a theory of *privileged vulnerability* that questions and then demands that instructors interrogate power and dominance in our communication artifacts, interactions, and institutions. The political act of being simultaneously vulnerable and privileged in our positions as educators in one of the oldest disciplines—Communication—

cannot be downplayed. Moreover, the participants' discussion of feminist identification practices indicates a theoretical understanding of the naming of feminist pedagogy as an inherently political CCP praxis. The emergent feminist definitions of this study orient feminism as an ongoing process that is never complete, much like Foucault's (1977) discourse, McGee's (1990) fragments, or hooks's (2001) movement in action.

Implications

In this section, I offer three implications for how to use our privileged feminist pedagogical platforms to give voice to our vulnerabilities within the classroom. First, privileged vulnerability compels us to disrupt our understandings of feminism in the communication discipline. My interviews with the 22 participants not only provides a shared narrative of feminist perception in the communication classroom, but also reflects the work we have ahead of us to challenge perceptions--our students *and* our own. We must continue to take a critical lens to our definitions and practices of feminism and feminist pedagogy. Despite participants' solidarity to the historic specificity of collective feminist movement, they accept the privileged opportunity to be vulnerable and open to change if the intentions behind the movement reaches more students. Can rethinking connections to a particular label, in this case feminism, coexist with a commitment to the historical, structural specificity of feminist movement? Although the shared narrative is not reflective of all feminist communication pedagogical praxis, the overwhelming repetition and salience of the themes of privilege and vulnerability points to the need for future research around these concepts, especially as they relate to our students.

We also must be reflexive about how students might engage with our embodied feminist praxis. Are we walking the walk? Are we teaching about and citing scholars of color, trans scholars, and immigrant scholars? Are we inclusive and intersectional in practice, or just in theory? I keep these questions in mind due to several recent interactions in which students have messaged me to ask about the feminist scholarship I have been reading lately, an office visit during which a student inquired whether I could read a critical media paper to see if it fits a particular graduate program's focus, or the Instagram post from a former student encouraging me to read his public call to Trump to stop being racist and transphobic.

Second, privileged vulnerability reminds us to examine our own privilege. Following an accident that fractured her pelvis, Ahmed (2017) explained the embodied connections of privilege as a mode of energy saving:

I began to think more about my able-bodied privilege, which is not to say that I have thought about it enough. I have not. It is easy for me to forget to think about it, which is what makes a privilege a privilege: the experiences you are protected from having; the thoughts you do not have to think (Ahmed, 2017, p. 181).

Reading about Ahmed's embodied awakening resonated with my own belated awakening to privilege. For example, many participants discussed subversive teaching practices as integral to weaving in intersectionality and critiques of privilege into their pedagogy. Not until working on this project did I realize the privileged opportunity of subversive teaching, especially those instructors with white privilege.

As a queer woman who strategically mixes my use of the words "partner" and "husband"

to identify my spouse, I recognize I benefit both from heterosexual and white privilege. However, I had not taken the time to reflect on how that privilege intersected with my pedagogical identity and performance until recently. I spent much of my previous research output focused on the vulnerability side of the equation, examining how my gender, queerness, and working-class background were sutured into my pedagogy. However, laced throughout these markers of being “othered” I lost sight of the immense privilege I occupy, both as an educator and now as a member of the white middle-class.

After completing the interviews during the middle of my sabbatical term, I spent the majority of my time reading scholarship from Black feminists, queer scholars, scholars of color, activist scholarship, and disability scholarship. I carved out as much time as I could to engage with this privileged space of time away from the usual semester demands from students and administrators. I value immeasurably the release time and the faculty development funds that my privileged position in the university afforded me to do this work. I recognize that colleagues in many states are facing budget cuts, furloughs, and even threats to closing entire communication departments, which makes it even more imperative for those of us whose institutions provide grants and leave time to apply for those privileges. Furthermore, we must commit to creating space for intersectional feminist communication pedagogy via these privileges.

Third, privileged vulnerability encourages us to be more vulnerable educators. Although popular trade press titles about gender and feminism continue to find bookshelf space, thanks in part to the success of Roxane Gay’s 2014 edited collection, *Bad Feminist*, as well as many women celebrities proclaiming themselves as feminists in interviews about their work, the accessibility and popular press coverage of feminism have not necessarily made it easier to teach about the dreaded “F” word or position communication topics around intersectional issues of class, race, and sexuality. In fact, when discussion of gender appeared to be at a crescendo during the 2016 presidential campaign, my professor friends and I continued to struggle with how to discuss gender and feminism in innovative, approachable ways, as well as *live* feminism as models of activism and advocacy for our students.

Allen (2011) noted that critical pedagogy encourages educators to live social activism and transform our teaching lenses and practices by facilitating classrooms that are sites of “resistance and empowerment, where students acquire (and faculty hone) critical perspectives and skills that can not only reform the classroom and higher education, but also translate into other contexts” (p. 110).

Just as a few of my participants shared, I, too, want to be better at my job. By this, I mean *I want to do the work*. I want to feel compassion, while also feeling motivated to let any feelings of anger or fear filter into my activism. I’m reminded of the week following the 2016 presidential election, when some of my students, mostly from minority communities along intersections of race, religion, sexuality, and class, contacted me to express fear and sadness. They eventually organized a peaceful classroom walkout and brought together student and community leaders to the front steps of our grandest academic building to claim a space of acceptance and love on our campus. I felt emboldened by their actions and agreed to speak at the student organized gathering. I also worked with colleagues to write a public letter addressing our students, letting them know that we support them. A theory of privileged vulnerability

encourages us to open the door to vulnerability in order to find space for activism and social justice in our classrooms and our mentoring.

Conclusion

In *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed (2017) wrote, “Feminist work is memory work” (p. 22). Although I did not read Ahmed’s words until months after I completed the 22 interviews, they no less informed my interpretation of my fellow feminist communication educators’ memories as they meshed with my own. Of course, these memories are partial and imperfect. Future research might enhance, or interrogate, a working theory of privileged vulnerability by investigating the pedagogical memories of more educators—or perhaps students—but the privileged, vulnerable, embodied memories shared here are important to the CCP canon. “To share a memory is to put a body into words” (Ahmed, p. 23). With each interview, every transcript, the participants’ stories resonated to my core. Their vulnerabilities became mine. My privilege as a feminist researcher became part of the fabric of their collective voice. This collective analytical story of privileged vulnerability compels us to keep opening doors to and creating space for discussions of privilege, vulnerability, and feminist activism in our communication pedagogy.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a feminist life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Allen, B. J. (2011). Critical communication pedagogy as a framework for teaching difference and organizing. In D. K. Mumby (Ed.) *Reframing difference in organizational communication studies: Research, pedagogy, practice* (pp. 103-125). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2011). Grounded theory methods in social justice research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 359-380). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dannels, D. P., Darling, A., Fassett, D. L., Kerksen-Griep, J., Lane, D., Mottet, T. P., Nainby, K., & Sellnow, D. (2014) Inception: Beginning a new conversation about communication pedagogy and scholarship. *Communication Education, 4*, 366-382.
doi:10.1080/03634523.2014.934849
- Eaton, C. (2001). The practice of feminist pedagogy. *Feminist Media Studies, 1*, 390-391.
doi:10.1080/14680770152649613
- Fassett, D., & Warren, J. (2007). *Critical communication pedagogy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York, NY: Vintage.
- Friere, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. 30th anniversary ed. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Gay, R. (2014). *Bad feminist*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.
- Giroux, H. A. (1997). *Pedagogy and the politics of hope: Theory, culture, and schooling*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Gray, D. (2014). *Doing research in the real world*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

- Jaschik, S. (2017, Feb. 27). Professors and politics: What the research says. *Insider Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/02/27/research-confirms-professors-lean-left-questions-assumptions-about-what-means>
- Johnson, P. E. (2017). Walter White(ness) lashes out: *Breaking Bad* and male victimage. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 34, 14-28. doi:10.1080/15295036.2016.1238101
- Kahl, D. H., Jr. (2013). Critical communication pedagogy and assessment: Reconciling two seemingly incongruous ideas. *International Journal of Communication*, 7, 2610-2630.
- Lindemann, K. (2011). Performing (dis)ability in the classroom: Pedagogy and (con)tensions. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 31, 285-302. doi:10.1080/10462937.2011.573188
- McGee, M. C. (1990). Text, context, and the fragmentation of contemporary culture. *Western Journal of Communication*, 54, 274-89. doi: 0.1080/10570319009374343
- Olson, L. (2004). The role of voice in the (re)construction of a battered woman's identity: An autoethnography of one woman's experience of abuse. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 27, 1-33. doi:10.1080=07491409.2004.10162464
- Rodriguez, A. (2010). *Revisioning diversity in communication studies*. Leicester, UK: Troubador.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rudick, C. K. (2017). A critical organizational communication framework for communication and instruction scholarship: Narrative explorations of resistance, racism, and pedagogy. *Communication Education*, 66, 148-167. doi:10.1080/03634523.2016.1265137
- Stephenson-Abetz, J. (2012). Everyday activism as a dialogic practice: Narratives of feminist daughters. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 35, 96-117. doi:10.1080/07491409.2012.667868
- Stern, D. M. (2011). You had me at Foucault: Living pedagogically in the digital age. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 21, 249-266. doi:10.1080/10462937.2011.573191
- Stern, D. M. (2015). Engaging autoethnography: Feminist voice and narrative intervention. *Women & Language*, 38, 83-102.
- Warren, J. T. (2001). Doing whiteness: On the performative dimensions of race in the classroom. *Communication Education*, 50, 91-108. doi:10.1080/03634520109379237
- Warren, J. T. (2008). Performing difference: Repetition in context. *Journal of International & Intercultural Communication*, 1, 290-308. doi:10.1080/17513050802344654