

Sexism Reloaded

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At different times and in differing cultures, a woman's body has been idealized differently. These ideals encompassed questions concerning governance and appearance of Her body, as well as control over Her body. The answers to these questions were usually and to a large extent given from the outside hetero-male gaze. As a result, women knew how to perform „their womanhood“ in order to be recognized as one. The criteria at hand have changed - but have they really disappeared? Could one maybe talk of a different kind of „True Womanhood“, and if so, what are its requisites? Have the former ideals that were written on Her body really been 'wiped off', or have they instead maybe even become internalized to some degree? Are there new ideals, and if so whose are they? What do they symbolize? Or why do authors and writers like Natasha Walters and Laurie Penny speak about a "Return of Sexism" and of a "Meat Market. Female Flesh under Capitalism"? Both describe an extreme focus on the woman's body with an active participation of some women which leads (among others) to the question: who owns her body? Is it still a mere object that holds as much (cultural, symbolic, social and financial) capital as is attributed to? Could we speak of an internalized sexism? To what extent has She gained full authority over her body, and on the modes of its and Her representation? How is this related to the rest of Her existence? Via a comparatively close reading of US and West-European media representations of women over time in the fields of sports/athletic activity, politics, advertisement, and art, I would like to investigate the questions: what narrative do media representations offer? To what type of Narrative do they contribute, which do they challenge? Is the term "Backlash" appropriate, or rather misleading? What kind of strategies could be used or need to be developed to counter sexism?

Last semester, I had the great privilege of conducting a so-called Q-Tutorial, which offered me the chance to invest in a topic dear to my heart: dismantling sexism. After months of preparation, I was finally about to have my first session. My initial uncertainty about whether students would be interested in my topic proved to be unnecessary: approximately 37 students showed up in the first session. While numbers dropped as the semester progressed (as they usually do), I still consider myself lucky: not only did the group consist of a stable number of 25 students, but moreover, these students took great interest in the subject, always prepared the material (texts, questions, thoughts), and – the element that I took most pleasure in seeing – engaged in lively and enthusiastic discussions with each other. To me, it was an amazing experience, and something I gained a lot from. One of the things I reflected upon during the course of the semester was that my methodology was not intersectional enough. This is what I will improve next semester, since I will again have the great pleasure to tutor a renewed and revised version of my tutorial: Sexism Reloaded: A woman's Body – A Contested Terrain. The syllabus is a work in progress: as I learned from last semester, having a "roadmap" is without a doubt important and crucial; but to be able to work around it, to respond to students' needs and interest, to remain flexible up to a certain degree is a necessity I would neither want to deprive myself nor fellow students of.

Something I often missed during my studies is the teaching staff connecting theory and praxis. Not because the theories are necessarily hard to understand; rather, this combination is key for pinpointing their potency, meaning and relevance outside the academia. According to the feedback I

received from many participants, we managed to establish precisely this connection: with the support of the selected texts, the chosen topics, and the space and freedom to combine academic teaching/learning with personal experience, theory was given new life, and praxis was enriched and often better understood because of what the theories had to offer. The feedback I received proved how impactful my course was for my participants; it changed perspectives and perception of not only their/our society and culture, but even influenced personal relationships. As mentioned before, combining theory and praxis is not only a highly productive and sustainable teaching method: it is multifaceted.

One key concept in feminist discourse is arguably “empowerment”. I’d still like to think that this tutorial contributed to all of its members personal empowerment. The work everyone invested, be it by using moodle in order to share material, the constructive analysis of all kinds of texts, the exchange of thoughts, questions and experiences, does not only attest to the participants interest in and enthusiasm about the subject matter. Especially the last sessions’ focus on possible ways to counteract sexism in its various forms, and participants’ willingness to call into question what is often considered ‘natural’ because it has become naturalized and thus internalized, is (to my perspective) an important and first step to tread a self-determined and self- governed path.