

Radical Education and Intersectionality: Who Is Bell Hooks?

Many of us are well aware of the indoctrination in today's classrooms. Whether it's [sexually explicit materials](#) or woke ideology in the classroom, each day seems to bring a new round of insanity.

But when it comes to radical ideas in education today, the root of the problem goes back decades. In the 20th century, one thinker—among [others](#)—was laying the groundwork for the problems plaguing our educational institutions.

Who Is Bell Hooks?

Gloria Watkins—better known by her pen name “bell hooks”—was an influential writer, theorist, educator, and social critic, whose ideas about race, feminism, class, education, film, and intersectionality have contributed to shaping modern academic and public discourse on these topics.

Born to African American parents in 1952, Watkins/hooks grew up in a working-class family in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. She attended both segregated and non-segregated schools and was an avid reader at a young age.

Watkins, even as a child, positioned herself as a rebel—talking back to parents and other authority figures. She identified with her great-grandmother, Bell Blair Hooks, who was known for her sharp tongue and propensity to speak her mind. In her 1989 book [Talking Back](#), hooks recalls:

To make my voice I had to speak, to hear myself talk—and talk I did—darting in and out of grown folk's conversations and

dialogues, answering questions that were not directed at me, endlessly asking questions, making speeches. ... Bell Hooks, as I discovered, claimed, and invented her, was my ally.

Her decision not to capitalize the pen name was, [in her words](#), “kind of a gimmicky thing.” There was a trend among feminist women in the '60s and '70s to uncapitalize their names so people would focus on their ideas and works, not the authors of those works.

Intersectionality

hooks' defiant speech didn't end with childhood. After completing college and graduate school, she became an English professor and lecturer, where her focus was to call out alleged structures of power and oppression through social commentary on race, capitalism, gender, and “intersectionality.”

The unwieldy term “intersectionality” was coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in her [1989 paper](#) with the equally unwieldy title “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” The term “intersectionality” describes how a person might be oppressed or victimized as a result of more than one aspect of his identity simultaneously. Crenshaw attempted to make an analogy between victimization and traffic: Oppression can hit you from multiple sides at once, just like cars at a road intersection.

For example, if a person is black, female, and lesbian, she might, in theory, suffer discrimination on multiple fronts at the same time: race, gender, and sexual orientation. The oppression is compounded as one form reinforces another. In the eyes of intersectionality theorists, it's a mistake to focus too much on just one axis of victimhood—all possible sources of victimization ought to be taken together.

Even before the term “intersectionality” came into vogue, hooks was pushing back against second-wave feminism from a standpoint very similar to Crenshaw’s. [hooks argued](#) that mainstream feminism failed to account for issues of racial and class exploitation. In other words, feminism at that time (beginning in the 1950s) was too white and too wealthy. “I began to feel estranged and alienated from the huge group of white women who were celebrating the power of ‘sisterhood,’” she wrote.

In [the words of journalist and author Ed West](#), bell hooks “took things to the next stage by criticizing postmodernism, postmodern theory and postmodern feminism for excluding black people, women and the working class.” For hooks, the radicalism of her time was not radical enough.

On a personal level as on the intellectual level, hooks fit well within an intersectional framework of victimhood since she was black, female, and “[queer-pas-gay](#)” (whatever that is, exactly). She is considered a pioneer in the realm of “intersectionality,” which has come to dominate higher education.

Educational Theory

hooks explained her pedagogical beliefs in her book [Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom](#). As the title implies, education is about the casting off of all forms of restraint that could possibly be imposed on the individual. The purpose of a teacher is to show students how to “transgress” against racial, sexual, or class limitations, to give them tools to defy existing social structures. In other words, teachers should create revolutionaries.

In addition, according to hooks, the classroom should never bore the students, and all voices should be heard, with teachers learning from students and vice versa.

Her educational ideas influenced and are mirrored in the notorious [1619 Project](#): hooks [proclaimed in 2013](#) that the U.S was “founded and colonized on a foundation of white supremacist thought and action.”

These same ideas run rampant in today’s [educational institutions](#). Universities often seem more occupied with teaching students to be revolutionaries than teaching course material. Meanwhile, public schools are indoctrinating young minds with [radical LGBTQ+ ideology and critical race theory](#).

Film Theory

hooks also built upon feminist Laura Mulvey’s concept of the “male gaze,” the idea that Hollywood cinema has an encoded male perspective within it that looks on women as mere sexual objects. hooks, who, like Mulvey, was fascinated with film and its ability to [propagandize](#), proposed that black spectators of cinema should engage in an [“oppositional gaze.”](#)

What is this “oppositional gaze”? hooks argued that looking is always an act that involves dynamics of power and confrontation. Historically, blacks, especially slaves, had to be careful how they directed their gaze, as it might be punished as sign of rebellion. In their “oppositional gaze” on films, blacks could look at whites and white culture in a way they otherwise couldn’t. Black men could gaze on white women with desire and not receive punishment for it. Blacks could analyze and question the white world through movies, their gazes taking on the characteristics of evaluation and even dominance. Yet, at the same time, the objectification of white women continued the “violent erasure of black womanhood,” as even black cinema maintained a male perspective that put white women on a pedestal.

Bell Hooks' Legacy

In summary, bell hooks joined the ranks of many revolutionary intellectuals in the mid-to-late 20th century who helped create a Franken-ideology—composed from the rotting corpses of a number of terrible modern philosophies, including Marxism, nihilism, radical feminism, and [postmodernism](#)—currently haunting the halls of American educational, artistic, and political institutions.

In [a panel discussion](#) on “Liberating the Black Female Body,” hooks relates that all her life she just “wanted to be free.” She says she had to resist first her parents and then the imperialist patriarchy in order to achieve this “freedom.”

This cry of total emancipation embodies hooks' philosophy well—and the philosophy of much of our society today. The radicals behind movements like transgenderism have philosophical roots in the same disposition of discontent and the rejection of any restraints whatsoever in the name of liberty. But what these radicals mean by liberty is really license, a license as destructive as it is self-centered. They will not serve any order outside themselves, whether that be biological, political, social, or moral. They move doggedly from one frontier to the next (feminism, homosexuality, transgenderism, pedophilia) trashing traditional moral strictures until no rules remain—and no protections, either.

Like Shelley's Frankenstein, they have created a monster that will, if unchecked, destroy itself and the society around it.

—

Image credit: “[Lozu mont oct8](#)” by Alex Lozupone (Tduk) on *Wikimedia Commons*, [CC BY-SA 4.0](#). Image cropped and background added.