

Notes taken by students

International Symposium

Education and Gender Equality

Wellesley College, October 20 & 21, 2017

Panel Discussion – Saturday, 4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. – The role of new media in the promotion of gender equality

Speakers:

- Céline Schillinger, Director of Innovation and Engagement for Global Quality at Sanofi Pasteur
- Anaïs Bourdet, Graphic Designer, Teacher and founder of "Paye ta Shnek"
- Lina Ben Mhenni, activist, human rights defender, author of the popular blog "ATunisianGirl" freelance translator and writer
- Anne Balsamo, Dean of the School of Arts, Technology and Emerging Communication at the University of Texas at Dallas
- Joey Cole, Senior Producer at MSNBC

Moderator:

- Michael Jeffries, Associate Professor of American Studies at Wellesley College

Main points:

- Immense power lies in being able to use social media to spread activists' messages.
- New media and engagement online allows you to work without any money, just investment of your own time:
 - o Allows women to become aware of sexist phenomena and create communities to defend each other
 - o Gives a new way to have an impact on a larger community
 - o Community owns specific tools to help solve the problems
 - o With the help of Facebook, able to work with government and transportation companies to target issues of sexual harassment
- New media shows the reality of women's and girls' experiences in Tunisia in the past and present:
 - o Liberates speech and creates new platform for whoever wants to express their ideas
 - o Importance of being able to express anonymous ideas online allows women to connect with one another
 - o Hashtags like #metoo gave the courage to many women to share their experiences of sexual harassment and highlight the prevalence of the issue amongst all women
 - o However, new media does pose threats to women in the form of online harassment
 - o The real fight is on the field, but the support the internet community is invaluable and indeed necessary.
- What is new media?
 - o Anaïs Bourdet's blog: She runs a blog about street harassment, which in a mere few days became popular all over France. Her mission is to give a voice to those who don't have one, not to speak for them. The blog rallied people to petition the Senate to change its mind on an unpopular decision.
 - o Women of the World Talk Back - a documentary allowing women to be interviewed and express their true desires and needs
 - o FEMTECHNET
 - Activate feminist networks across US and UK to help bring women working on science, technology, etc. who took into consideration feminist ideology when thinking about technology access, etc.

- Wikistorming
 - Read for names not included on Wikipedia of women, read along the lines of sexist thought in existing articles, etc.
- Activism through hashtags
 - #Jan25
 - #IdleNoMore
 - #BlackLivesMatter
 - #BringBackOurGirls
 - #UmbrellaRevolution
 - All these hashtags need to be understood in a larger context and how we can connect hashtags to embodied and situated activism happening on the ground
- Must integrate new social media platforms into how we produce the news these days
 - Women can now perform on their own on Instagram, Twitter, etc. to carry out reverse programming of journalism
 - Barriers exist with traditional social activism, but social media breaks these barriers down
 - Empowering to see women on social media, but women must carry responsibility when it comes to putting out their voice
 - Report the truth and give a voice to the voiceless
- We must be aware that clicking a button on the internet does not create real change; real-world action must follow.

Best practices evoked regarding public policies, corporate actions, civil society or academic initiatives:

- WikiStorming: Teach women (and everyone) how to read Wikipedia for names that aren't there, i.e. implicit white, male bias. Teach people how to edit and correct for things that are erroneous/sexist on Wikipedia.
- Physically mobilizing women: The need for conferences and NGOS: the example of the International Women's Conference in Beijing, the Women's March.
- FemTechNet, DOCCs: a concerted effort to activate feminist networks across North America and abroad to bring together all women working on critical science/tech studies. Created a DOCC (distributed open collaborative course), where teachers and students collaborated through networks, shared activities, online office hours, etc. Enabled people who were laboring in different institutional contexts to be present with one another and connect.
- Combat online violence (another form of violence against women and other marginalized groups).