

Zdenka ŠADL, Tajda FERKO*

INTERSECTIONALITY AND FEMINIST ACTIVISM: STUDENT FEMINIST SOCIETIES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Abstract. The perspective of intersectionality underlines the fact that oppression in a society has several sources that interact with and overlap each other. Intersectionality is not only an academic project but also forms part of feminist activism. In the first part of the article, we provide a brief overview of feminist waves and intersectionality, along with the design that underpins our study. In the second part, intersectionality is analysed relative to student feminist societies (SFS) operating at 84 universities across the United Kingdom. Our study was conducted by using the interview method – talks with leading SFS members around the United Kingdom – and a survey which included a significantly larger sample of SFS members. The authors conduct a socio-demographic analysis of SFS' members and examine their openness towards minority groups as an indicator of their intersectionality. The vast majority of the societies' members strongly identified with intersectional feminism, while their affiliation with third-wave feminism was considerably lower. Interviews with leading SFS members showed that intersectionality significantly affects their feminist discourse and practices. Although the societies are open to minority groups, room for improvement remains.

Keywords: *third-wave feminism, intersectionality, student feminist societies, minority groups*

Introduction

Intersectionality has become a feminist buzzword (Davis, 2008) for describing the theoretical and methodological frameworks that address “the multiplicative relations of axes” (Huijg, 2012: 7) of identity, such as gender,

* Zdenka Šadl, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; Tajda Ferko, M. Sc., Online Marketing Associate.

race, class and sexuality (among others), and as a political practice and strategy leading toward greater justice. In the very core of the initial debates on intersectionality was black feminists' criticism of "white feminism", focused solely on making progress in issues faced by middle-class white women and thereby overlooking the issues of all other women (Lutz et al., 2011: 2-3). Over the years, the intersectional perspective has encouraged a more inclusive approach to viewing women's position in society, one that analyses their social location, experience and identity as being determined not just by sexism, but also by racism, classism, ageism, heteronormativity, ableism and other major systems of oppression. The importance of this analytical turn is that it facilitated an examination of the *interactions* of categories of difference, their synergistic consequences and meaning, and not simply adding or layering various ontologically separate and autonomously functioning structures of oppression and domination. Having coined the term intersectionality in 1989, Crenshaw (1989: 140) states: "intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism".

The increased interest in intersectionality as a critical response to the monistic stance - "whereby gender oppression was privileged over other structures of domination" (Roth, 2004: 188) and the 'introversion' of (white) second-wave feminism and its trenchantly ahistoric notion of the communal (universal) experience of women's oppression or, as its correction, has in the past three decades grown into a paradigm in which it occurs as a theory or an epistemological-methodological frame of research, a system of beliefs and ideas and a political project (on this topic, see Doetsch-Kidder, 2012). Earlier intersectional theories "were rooted in feminist politics, born of experience" (Roth, 2004: 12-13), and feminist theories (knowledge) and transversal politics (Yuval Davis, 2006), both relying on the intersectionality paradigm, have then been oriented to guiding feminist activism.

It is the ramification and contentiousness of the concept that has, even though intersectionality now serves as a main concept in Western feminist discourse, made defining it thoroughly and inflexibly a more difficult task. The understanding of intersectionality in this article stems from Davis' definition of intersectionality as *interaction* "between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Davis, 2008: 68) and also from the views that: (a) gender as an aspect of intersectionality is not "always and everywhere the most important social identity, but it is the most pervasive, visible, and codified" (Shields, 2008: 307); (b) intersections of factors of division produce "different impacts on different groups of women and on the relations between these groups" (Charles and Wadia, 2014: 10, note 2); in other words, they generate "qualitative differences among different intersectional

positions” (Shields, 2008: 303) where, as pointed out by Huijg (2012: 9), the location of the contradictory structural forces (i.e. the junction of disadvantage – as gender and advantage – as race) help to (intersectionally) situate white women on opposite sides in power relations; (c) intersectionality is oriented to transformation and social justice (May, 2015: 21), building coalitions among different groups of women, and between feminist and non-feminist groups – “women have different identities but also (...) they can come together around specific issues” (Charles and Wadia, 2014: 4) – or building the practice and theory of “transversal politics” (Yuval Davis, 2006) to open space for dialogue and empathy. Intersectionality is not only an academic project but also forms an integrated part of feminist activism guided by feminist theories (knowledge) and the requirements of transversal politics.

Drawing on Broad’s (2017: 43) observation that there is a relative paucity of empirical work on intersectional practice and activism, we suggest that greater attention should be paid to such research. In this article, intersectionality in feminism is to be analysed in relation to feminist activism. In the decades-long articulation of intersectionality, gender (as an axis of difference and a category of analysis) in isolation from other categories of difference was, as Huijg (2012: 6) argues, rejected, at least in theory. But, how mindful of intersectional issues are contemporary feminist activists and how is intersectionality practised by feminist activist groups? In an attempt to contribute to this under-researched area, in this article we explore how intersectionality is understood and being ‘done’ by today’s feminist movement.

Despite the wide international presence of student feminist societies (SFS) in the UK, USA, Australia, Belgium, the Netherlands, Czech Republic etc. and the fact that feminist students – as agents of change – are vital to the sustainability of feminist organising, student feminist activists have so far been largely overlooked.¹ Regarding the finding about the “‘resurgence’ of feminism in the UK, allegedly being led by young women” (Mackay, 2011: 153) and in the context of the lack of research on student feminists in academic literature, we will focus on SFS in the United Kingdom. We are interested in identifying how ‘intersectional’ young feminist activists are in their efforts to effectively articulate justice and advocate equal opportunity for all (students).

The intersectionality of SFS will be researched in terms of their inclusion of social minorities, while also assessing the position SFS members hold towards third-wave feminism. We will explore the members’ identification

¹ Some studies examine young women and feminist activism in the UK, such as those by Mackay (2011) and Charles and Wadia (2014). Also see Evans (2015).

with third-wave feminism and their relationship to the wave discourse as a whole, whether or not they follow and take intersectionality into account and (if so) how the concept is reflected in their openness to understanding the concerns of different social minorities. Intersectionality will be examined from two standpoints: how members of SFS understand the term intersectionality and how intersectionality is reflected in the societies' inclusion of social minorities. Three main research questions were outlined before the study. (1) Do members of SFS relate their work to third-wave feminism? (2) How do the leading members of SFS understand intersectionality? (3) Is intersectionality as the interaction between gender and other categories of difference included in the work of SFS?

Feminist waves and intersectionality

The literature customarily divides the history of feminism into three 'waves': a first, second and third wave, with each period representing a different era in the struggle to end oppression and advance social justice. Any brief overview of such waves is reductive, where one difficulty is that feminist waves cannot be fully understood without contextualising them within the wider societal framework of which they were and still form part. We do not focus here on the contextualisation of feminist ideas and practices, but choose to emphasise only certain specific issues or characteristics of the feminist waves that seem to be generally accepted and/or related to intersectionality.

Intersectionality has a long history dating back to the 19th century in the United States: However, it was only in the 1980s that concept was popularised by Kimberlé Crenshaw. First-wave feminism (1830s - early 1900s) focused on the acquisition of women's rights in the public sphere - legal and constitutional rights, especially the right to vote (Evans, 2015a: 5), as well as the right to education and access middle-class jobs. Even though before Crenshaw a plethora of feminists had destabilised the idea of a universal woman and highlighted the fragmentation of 'female experience', the first wave of feminism was "generally, but not exclusively, bourgeois" (Eurydice, 2010: 16). Promoting the rights of a very small spectrum of women points to the negation of intersectionality in this wave of feminism, which, however, did not receive any deeper criticism from within. Second-wave feminism emerged sometime between 1960 and 1970 (and remained until the 1980s) when feminist views on social problems, such as violence against women, the right to abortion and contraception and the demands to break sexual taboos first emerged. Although now mainly known for its promotion of women's reproductive rights and equal pay for work (Eurydice, 2010: 16), the second wave of feminism was in fact immensely dynamic, and consisted of diverse

philosophies, practices and policies (Hammer, 2006: 512–513; Worell, 2001). The second wave, much like the first one, also chiefly promoted the rights of white, heterosexual, middle-class women ('the white revolution'), but the lack of inclusivity – unlike during the first-wave – triggered harsh internal criticism during the second historical phase of second-wave feminism (Snyder, 2008). Crenshaw saw intersectionality as the interaction of gender and race, and claimed that "although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices" (Crenshaw, 1991: 1242). The gender/race/social class triad was then first expanded by Patricia Hill Collins, who also included sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality and age (Collins, 2002: 299).² The main trends and topics of the third wave of feminism (1990s – present) are the evaluation and criticism of the second-wave theories, the starting point being the difference between women (Worell, 2001: 470), female sexuality, psychological violence, sexual harassment in the school and workplace (Code, 2000: 474). Although the second wave addressed diversity, provided a framework for thinking about intersectionality, and saw the writings of feminists of colour from the early 1980s as being central to their feminism (Snyder, 2008: 180), intersectionality is often (wrongly) seen as one of the distinctive contributions of the third wave. Snyder (2008: 175–176) is critical of those who overemphasise the third wave's distinctiveness in terms of intersectionality, but at the same time argues the third wave has developed an "intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism", embraced "multivocality over synthesis and action over theoretical justification" and built coalitions with other social groups. The third-wave feminists "accept contradiction, pluralism, and hybridity as given, since no account of oppression is true for all women in all situations all the time" (Gray and Boddy, 2010: 382).

The intersectionality perspective presumes that the combination of different identities cannot be understood as "increasing one's burden but instead as producing substantively distinct experiences" (even though discrimination based on multiple grounds should not be overlooked) (Symington, 2004: 2). In addition, intersectionality allows us to identify the "oppressor within us", by explaining our social position as the intersection of various social categories (Collins, 1993: 98). Collins claims that this oppressor lies within us all, not just within those who belong to privileged social groups. That means a person can be discriminated against on the grounds of one of their characteristics or a particular social background, but simultaneously possesses another characteristic that brings them social privileges.

² In Slovenia, the interconnection of sexism and classism was discussed in the 1980s and 1990s by Maca Jogan, who was also sensitive to factors such as religious backgrounds and education (see, for example, Jogan, 1990).

Characterising the feminist movement by dividing it into waves is not without problems due to the fact that different eras are intertwined, and the endeavours, visions and interests of individual waves tend to coincide with one another. Notwithstanding this, the chronological narrative of such waves remains in place today. However, waves are not solely defined by historical eras. Some feminists might still strongly identify with second-wave feminism today (Mackay, 2011: 155–156), despite third-wave feminism being a well-established concept and the emergence of fourth-wave feminism (Phillips and Cree, 2014: 2). Further, the generational approach can imply that second-wave feminism (which many authors believe is still underway) “is redundant and needs to be replaced with a qualitatively distinct mode of feminism” (Dean, 2009: 346). Neither a strict content-related divide nor a clear distinction in the time of occurrence exists between different waves, and there is even continuity in terms of intersectionality which finds, as Gordon argues (2016), its predecessors in the socialist feminist of the 1970s, as well as older feminist (socialist) theorists and activists.

While this article explores SFS, which some authors contend already belong to fourth-wave feminism (Evans, 2015a: 5–6), they are discussed here in the light of the third wave. Ever since the start of the new millennium, the UK has seen a staggering rise in numbers of student feminist organisations and activist groups. Within the UK, the emergence of these new groups led to the first use of term third-wave feminism (that had already been in use in the USA from 1992) (Redfern and Aune, 2010: 10).

Study design and methods

While the majority of the research was conducted by authors based at the University of Ljubljana (Faculty of Social Studies) in Slovenia, a significant share of the interviews and research was also carried out at the University of Leeds in the UK. Our study was conducted by using the interview method – talks with leading SFS members across the United Kingdom were carried out as part of the study – and a survey that included a significantly larger sample of SFS members (Ferko, 2016). We used the structured interviewing method based on a pre-coded questionnaire “with a sequence of questions, asked in the same order and the same way of all subjects of the research” (Edwards and Holland, 2013: 3), although the structured type of interview method is often criticised for being ‘positivistic’, that is, for ignoring the subjectivity of the subject and assuming “predetermined forms of the social world” (Vogrinc, 2008: 53). Our decision to use a structured interview was mainly influenced by the significant geographical remoteness of the participants. In order to conduct the vast majority of interviews, we had to rely on various web devices such as Skype video chatting or more traditional

e-mail. Most interviews were conducted by e-mail since this provided us with a larger amount of participants. One interview, which represented the main information source on the work of SFS, was conducted in person. All of the interviews conducted in person or by Skype were then transcribed and thoroughly analysed. The pre-determined structure of the interviews also made comparing the answers easier. All participants were still asked to comment freely on the questions, to re-question them and note their comments down. By doing this, we encouraged the participants to cooperate on the creation of the questionnaire and to draw attention to any lack of clarity.

Six interviews were conducted in three different ways: in person, by video chat over Skype or by email. The majority of the interviews (4) were conducted by e-mail since this was preferred by participants. One interview was conducted in person and one using Skype. The participants in all six interviews were leading members of SFS at different universities throughout the UK. Their names have been replaced with block capitals in order to preserve their anonymity.

The surveys were passed on by posts in the closed Facebook groups of SFS. The sample amounted to 152 members of 20 SFS across the UK. The questionnaire was composed of 13 closed-ended questions, where three were Likert-scale survey questions. The survey questionnaire was split into two. The first part (8 questions) included questions on the participants' socio-demographic background. It aimed to give an insight into the diversity of the SFS. We specifically looked at gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, religiosity, as well as disability and learning disabilities. The questionnaire's second part focused exclusively on feminism, especially relative to third-wave feminism and intersectionality.

There is no database that includes a list of all student societies in the UK. SFS are relatively informal and diverse groups that have no supervisory authority capable of providing an overview of all the societies. Calculating our total population was made further difficult by the fact that the societies vary in size significantly. We thus had to no other option but to compile a list of all SFS by ourselves based on a list of all 127 universities in the UK (The Complete University Guide, 2016).³ This search came up with 84 SFS, meaning that around 66% of all UK universities have their own feminist society. Of these, 14 societies had no e-mail or other ways of contacting them, which brought us to a final number of 70 SFS with contact information. The 70 SFS received an e-mail with a short explanation of our research and a link to the online survey. Only seven societies responded to our e-mail so contact had to be established using a different approach. The most successful one was

³ The name of each university was entered into the Google search engine, together with the words "feminist society".

contacting the societies by Facebook's direct messaging system. All 20 SFS with their own Facebook group provided a response and participated in the survey. This leads us to the final group of 20, making up about 23% of all SFS in the UK.

Research question (1) will be evaluated by analysing the data collected through the interviews and surveys: the question asked SFS members about their affiliation to third-wave feminism and the usefulness of the wave narrative. To answer research question (2), we will analyse the interviews with leading SFS members which included direct questions about intersectionality. Research question (3) will be evaluated by analysing the interview and survey data, where the main part is the results of our survey that include members' socio-demographic background. The latter will indicate the diversity of the SFS based on six criteria: gender, sexual orientation, class affiliation, ethnic origin, religion, and disability and learning difficulties. This will show how the intersectionality of SFS is reflected in the breadth of their members, especially through their inclusion of social minorities. To answer research question (3), we will also analyse the second part of our survey that examined members' personal relationship to intersectionality and asked them to evaluate whether the student society they are a member of in the current academic year represents a 'safe' space for social minorities.

Student feminist societies in the UK

SFS in the UK operate within the student unions of individual universities. All higher education institutions in the UK have their own student union partly funded by the institution, but which remains politically independent (British Council, 2016). Most of them operate under the auspices of the National Union of Students, one of the biggest student organisations in the world, representing the interests of some 7 million students in the UK (Cardiff University Students' Union, 2016). Although student unions represent (perhaps) the most powerful player in British student politics, as observed by Brooks (Brooks et al., 2014: 1) almost no academic literature examines their work. This is even more the case when it comes to the lack of research on SFS. All the data used for this article was therefore gathered using interviews with SFS members (26 April - 18 May 2016), personal correspondence by e-mail with Elizabeth Evans, a leading third-wave author (13-19 February 2016), an interview with Jonathan Dean, a lecturer in politics at the University of Leeds with a particular interest in feminism (25 April 2016) and by the analysing websites and social media of the SFS.

The SFS are established and run exclusively by students themselves. The leading members of such societies normally make up a board/committee, which is democratically elected at the start of each academic year. In terms

of our article, one of the most interesting cases is the SFS at London's King College named the King's College London Intersectional Feminist Society. The latter is the only SFS to explicitly mention intersectionality in its name and has additional committee members like welfare officers, an LGBT rep and an interfaith officer.

The views of leading SFS members in the UK on intersectionality and third-wave feminism

The participants were initially asked about their take on whether or not the SFS they lead belong to third-wave feminism, whereby we also gained an insight into their personal attitudes to intersectionality and third-wave feminism. Participants B, C and D answered affirmatively, while the other participants (A, E, F) did not. While the term intersectionality was not used in the questionnaire itself, three participants mentioned it in their answer. Participant D argued that their society identifies with third-wave feminism as "this translates to having a more inclusive approach, and the idea that women should decide how to live their individual lives however they please, rather than being dictated to". Participant B also answered affirmatively, adding:

We like to think of ourselves as a group of intersectional feminists, and given that intersectionality tends to be at the heart of the third-wave I am proud to use that as a label.

Participant C's answer implied they understand third-wave feminism to be completely the same as intersectionality. Her answer to whether or not their society belongs to third-wave feminism was "Yes, I personally care about intersectionality and so does the society". Of all participants who did not answer in the affirmative, participant E argued the term third wave is not relevant when trying to describe their society's work, but they are however "focused on intersectional feminism". Participant A did not identify with third-wave feminism, but answered that the need to recognise each wave is important "within a larger social framework". While also not identifying with third-wave feminism, participant F stated:

[...] so in terms of a term like third-wave feminism, I don't think it's outdated, I just think that what we have now is more voices coming up and the floor being open to more discussions of what feminism is. Feminism is not cycles, it's just growth.

The second question asked participants to explain their understanding of intersectionality. One of the most common terms used in doing so was

“inclusivity”. The participants’ answers largely corresponded with the main definition of intersectionality found in feminist literature (emphasising multiple types of oppression and their mutual effects). In addition, participant B claimed intersectionality is “the basis of good feminism” and used an emotional marker – pride – to describe her relationship to it.

Participant F explored yet another side of intersectionality. She argued that to discuss different waves of feminism (as well as intersectionality) is to hold a privilege in society based on your access to education and thereby the works of different feminist authors.

When stating whether intersectionality is a concept that frequently crops up at their meetings, all participants answered affirmatively, but with certain variations about the true importance of the subject.⁴ As put by participant D:

It is the consensus that intersectional feminism is the only type of feminism we should be promoting. Due to social media, I feel awareness of the importance of intersectionality has vastly increased, and that this has filtered into FemSocs across the UK.

Participant E, who viewed intersectionality as the core part of her feminism, mentioned that intersectionality was the main content behind the society’s zine issued in the previous academic year. Nevertheless, participant B revealed a more problematic element of intersectionality.

In the core group of people who repeatedly show up at events, intersectionality is a major theme, but in the wider group there tends to be a sense that, unless you are educated, you are not welcome in our space.

Further, the respondents were also asked whether members of their feminist societies have different social and ethnic backgrounds.⁵ All participants emphasised that different ethnic minorities are quite well represented.

Participant B reported quite a large diversity of members, but mentioned that the ethnic mix is low, most likely as a result of the low ethnic diversity of the city and university in which they operate. They do, however, have male, non-binary and LGBT members, as well as several international students. The SFS has also established cooperation with the LGBT society at the university.

Participant D’s feminist society was based at a university in Northern Ireland, which was of special interest given that this part of the UK differs

⁴ The answers varied from just a simple “yes” all the way to more complex statements on intersectional feminism as the leading form of feminism today.

⁵ Whether or not their society has LGBT students, disabled students, students from religious and ethnic minorities, foreign students and male students.

from the rest in many regards. The participant mentioned their feminist society is less diverse since Northern Ireland has a population that is 96% white, compared to the 44% for London. Notwithstanding this, the society has a large number of foreign as well as some male students. Participant D also mentioned the cooperation of their feminist society and the local university's LGBT society in terms of organising certain events together. Moreover, all of their meetings are held in rooms accessible to disabled students and they also use everyday rather than overly academic language in their meetings "in order to prevent those from less fortunate backgrounds being ostracised".

Participant E also mentioned collaboration between different societies (feminist and Muslim society, or feminist and disabled students' society). Participant F shed light on an entirely new issue not mentioned in the other interviews, but which provides important insight into understanding the diversity of SFS. This participant's society was established as an answer to an older feminist society organised at the same university which, according to participant F, had not only failed to represent the interests of non-white members but to provide a safe space for them.

The vast majority of the leading members of the analysed SFS reported that at least some of their societies' members are male.

Socio-demographic background of SFS members and their views on the wave narrative and intersectionality

The survey ensured a larger sample of SFS members throughout the UK was collected, and also provided their socio-demographic background. Unless noted otherwise, all questions (see the annex) were formed based on the guidelines provided by the Office for National Statistics UK (2009). In total, there were 152 respondents from 20 different universities across the UK. The large majority of respondents were undergraduate students (83%), followed by master's (11%) and PhD students (6%). Accordingly, 83% of the respondents were undergraduate and 17% were postgraduate students. The question on gender identity (Conron et al., 2014) was not based on a binary division of gender as commonly found in questionnaires since we believe that offering just two options (male or female) would promote an outdated and exclusionary view of gender identity. Therefore, it was more suitable to present gender identity as a continuum. It comes as no surprise that the most common answer to this question was (b) female (80.5%), given that SFS largely target female university students. The remaining respondents answered (a) male (11%), while 8.5% chose (c) non-binary or (d) other - adding genderqueer, gender non-conforming and demimale. The question on sexual orientation was formed based on the guidelines for posing questions on

sexual orientation provided by Haseldon and Joloza (2009: 13). The sexual orientation of the majority of respondents was heterosexual (56%), followed by bisexual (25%) and homosexual (6%). Approximately 3% of respondents chose not to answer, whereas around 10% answered (e) other – adding sexually fluid and pansexual (pansexual is someone who is sexually attracted to people of all gender identities). The question on class identity was appropriate given that citizens of the UK feel a growing class divide (NatCen, 2016). Around 67% of the respondents chose answer (b) middle class, whereas 30% answered (a) working class and only 2% selected (c) high class. Participants also responded to the question on ethnic group (the question was formed based on the guidelines provided by Office for National Statistics UK, 2009) – the ethnic group of 85% of the respondents was white, while approximately 12% chose answers (b), (c) or (d). The remaining 3% selected answer (e) other (adding Arab or Ashkenazi Jewish). In answering the question about their religion, the majority of respondents chose answer (a) no religion (71%). Among the remaining respondents, 18% were Christian, 2% Muslim, 2% Jewish and 1% Jewish. Out of 9 respondents (6%) who chose answer (e) other, almost all of them (8) were agnostic, whereas 1 respondent was a Unitarian Universalist. Further, 21% of respondents answered affirmatively on the question about disability or learning difficulty.

The questions which followed researched their affiliation with feminism and views on diversity within their SFS. The great majority (86%) either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: I identify as an intersectional feminist, whereas only 1% strongly disagreed and 8% of respondents were undecided. We also asked the respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: The feminist society I am a member of is intersectional. The majority of respondents either agreed (44%) or strongly agreed (26%), 8% either disagreed or strongly agreed, while approximately 22% were undecided. We then asked the respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: The feminist society I am a member of represents a safe space for members of minorities (LGBT, class, ethnic and religious minorities, persons with disabilities). More than 80% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 2% strongly disagreed, approximately 6% disagreed, and a little over 11% were undecided. Finally, we asked the respondents about their view on using the wave narrative to describe different historical periods of feminism. Around 44% of respondents answered affirmatively about whether they agreed the wave narrative is still relevant when discussing feminism today, whereas around 26% did not agree and just under 30% did not know, and a little less than 50% of respondents answered affirmatively about whether they think SFS belong to third-wave feminism, whereas around 40% chose the answer (c) I do not know, and almost 10% did not agree.

Discussion

Data analysis and interpretation based on the interviews and questionnaires will help explain how the societies identify with third-wave feminism, as well as if and how intersectionality is reflected in their work. Research question (1) (Do members of the SFS relate their work to third-wave feminism?) required the collection of quantitative data showing that approximately half the respondents believe that SFS belong to third-wave feminism, although the second biggest share of respondents was undecided (39%). A relatively small share of respondents answered negatively (12%). The interviews with leading SFS members brought similar results. Approximately half the leading members relate their work to third-wave feminism, whereas the other half does not use the term at all. Three out of the six leading members directly related third-wave feminism to intersectionality. When attempting to answer research question (1), we can also rely on question 12 from the questionnaire which asked members whether they think the wave narrative is still useful when trying to describe feminism today. It seems opinions are largely split and the 'yes' answer is less prevalent. Most respondents answered affirmatively, yet almost one-third were undecided. The large share of undecided answers could not be the result of the respondents' unfamiliarity with the concept, given that both the survey and interview data show they use various terms to describe contemporary feminism such as intersectionality with ease. If we join the data collected in the surveys and interviews, we may argue that SFS members are aware of and acknowledge the wave narrative, although the wave division does not hold any significant value for their own activism.

When answering research question (2) (How do leading SFS members understand intersectionality?), we can report the societies' committees explain intersectionality in line with the various definitions given in the first part of this article. Intersectionality is thus understood as the acknowledgement of multiple oppressions in society, which are intertwined with and affect one another. On the other hand, our collected data also show that those asked do not leave intersectionality just to academic discourse, but also see it as a key part of their activism. By doing so, their societies are inclusive of members of social minorities, while they ensure their meetings are physically accessible (including for disabled persons) and linguistically accessible (by avoiding overly academic language).

In relation to research question (3) (Is intersectionality as the interaction between gender and other categories of difference included in the work of the SFS), the study shows that SFS are largely inclusive of social minorities and represent safe spaces for them. Within particular SFS, intersectionality was researched through their inclusion of persons from various

socio-demographic backgrounds. Half the interviewees reported frequent cooperation between their society and other minority societies on campus. Nevertheless, the survey results show the large dominance of white members (85%). A similar dominance was reported in the question about religion where the vast majority is non-religious, although five different religions are still represented among the various members. The greatest diversity within the SFS was found when it comes to their sexual orientation, where just over half the respondents identify as heterosexual. When asked about their class identity, a large majority (68%) identified themselves as middle class. This is not surprising given the rising costs of university tuition fees in the past 5 years (Minty, 2015: 3), making university education less accessible to the working classes. Question 11 was also used to discover the SFS' openness to social minorities, where 81% of respondents believed their society is a safe space for members of social minorities. This can also be related to Question 10 where the great majority agreed with the statement their society can be described as intersectional. To briefly answer research question (3), we may argue that the SFS do include intersectionality in their work, but some issues that were reported show their intersectionality could be improved. The biggest issue is the low representation of non-white members and the feeling reported by some members that they are not welcome at meetings if they are not sufficiently educated.

Conclusion

In our study of SFS in the UK, we focused on intersectionality which has proven to be the key characteristic of third-wave feminism and on the past decade when SFS in the UK has experienced sudden growth (The Telegraph, 2014), attracted the immense attention of both media and activists. Our study consisting of a survey with SFS members in the UK and interviews with their board members showed that intersectionality significantly affects their feminist discourse and shapes the form of activism and daily practices of many SFS and individual members. This was shown in two ways.

First, the study revealed a large disparity in the way SFS members identify with third-wave feminism and intersectionality. Namely, 44% of the respondents claimed the wave narrative is still relevant today, whereas 86% of them identified themselves as being intersectional feminists. In order for an individual to identify as an intersectional feminist, it is not necessary to identify with third-wave feminism or affirm the wave narrative at all. It seems at the moment that, even though both terms have been used in feminist studies for decades, intersectionality is the one that has gained significant attention in recent years. As Aikau et al. (2007 cited in Snyder, 2008: 178) note, whether an individual identifies with third-wave (or any other wave of) feminism has

more to do with where and when they entered the discourse than it does with the year of their birth. We may thus argue that dividing feminism into individual waves perhaps involves personal identity much more than actual differences in issues discussed by these waves – these issues are in fact intertwined and complemented by and between second-, third and fourth-wave feminism. Or, in the words of one participant (A): “(...) for me, it’s always just been feminism (...) we are still fighting for the same thing which is for equality between the sexes”.

Second, the leading SFS members present intersectionality as the key part of their activism, with intersectionality being the single type of feminism they want to promote. The intersectional thinking of our interviewees assumes that more than one structure of oppression or form of discrimination affects the individual’s position, and that they intersect with one another, rendering “everyone’s situation as unique” (participant A). Or: “Intersectionality is understanding, it’s saying what are your issues, why they separate from mine” (participant F). A large degree of affiliation with intersectionality was also found by analysing the survey data: the vast majority of respondents agreed with the statements “I identify as an intersectional feminist” and “The feminist society I am a member of is intersectional”.

Intersectionality also appears as a marker of inclusion, a practice that encourages interactions among people of different backgrounds and addresses their needs and interests. The survey results show the SFS vary demographically, especially when it comes to religiosity and sexual orientation, while a somewhat lower ethnic diversity was found. The interview data also reveal that SFS provide a space where a wide variety of people are welcome (“We are very keen to get LGBT students, disabled students, and students from religious and ethnic minorities and foreign students joining as well (...) And yes, the femsoc is open to people of all genders (...)” – participant E). As well as being inclusive of different social minorities and offering them a safe space, the analysed SFS also cooperate with other minority student societies in the UK. This is a good example of ‘transversal politics’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006), namely “forms of activism not premised on sharing identity, but on dialogue, coalition-building” (Dean and Aune, 2015: 388–389). We find this mode of activism relevant, especially in light of the recent criticism that intersectionality has become so over-theoretical that it can “no longer apply to people’s actual experiences”, even though Crenshaw’s contribution in 1989 “asks for greater attention and awareness, not more theory” (Moi in Bergström, 2015). Yet, reports can still be found of the marginalisation of other ethnic/‘race’ groups, thereby confirming Lutz’s (2015: 87) assertion that “exclusion of specific groups of women remains a salient problem for feminist activists”.

This form of feminist activism – whereby societies are open to minority

groups and there is a large amount of crossover between SFS and non-feminist societies – is one Crenshaw (2015) hoped to draw attention to by talking about the risks of over-theoretisation. As participant (D) explains: “Our message is spread using laymen’s terms and is not overly academic in order to prevent those from less fortunate backgrounds being ostracised”. It is therefore especially important that intersectionality is not only accepted at a theoretical discursive level, thus being rendered ‘just’ theoretical or ‘too theoretical’.

The researched SFS have adopted, collectively and individually, intersectionality as ‘politics of understanding’, as a tool for including different groups of people, and as a tool for revealing the marginalisation of less educated people within SFS. A continuing issue of emphasising intersectionality is its academic origin and nature, which discourage those without access to theoretical feminist discourse from engaging in it. This problem was raised by participant B who points out that the SFS as a safe learning environment is in fact safer for some than for others. Recognising and revealing power relations between educated and less-educated members (“It’s really privileged to be able to have education to learn terms (...)” – participant F) also implies using intersectionality as a tool to redress disadvantage and to build a “safer learning environment” (B) that uses a “not overly academic” discourse (participant D).

In the meantime, several indicators show its wider access to the term (its use in popular media, young activists’ strong awareness of the term, a large increase in searches of the term on Google) and provide hope that intersectionality will spread beyond academic publications. SFS could be one of the many ways to achieving this goal. Organising events that are open to all, not just university students, as mentioned by one participant, could be a way to make this happen. Including a larger circle of people could help alter the overly academic nature of intersectionality and feminism itself.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bergström, Ida Irene (2015): *Toril Moi: Feminist Theory Needs a Revolution*, Kilden, 27. February 2015. Accessible at <http://kjonnsforskning.no/en/2015/09/toril-moi-feminist-theory-needs-revolution> (17. 8. 2017).
- Broad-Wright, Kendal L. (2017): *Social Movement Intersectionality and Re-Centering Intersectional Activism*. Special Issue of *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice* (“What is Intersectional about Intersectionality Now? & Intersectionality in Austere Times: Boundary Crossing Conversations”), 38 (1): 41–53. Accessible at <http://journals.msvu.ca/index.php/atlantis/article/view/4646> (23. 11. 2016).
- Brooks, Rachel, Kate Byford and Katherine Sela (2014): *The changing role of students’ unions within contemporary higher education*. *Journal of Education Policy* 30 (2): 165–181. Accessible at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2014.924562> (17. 5. 2016).

- Charles, Nickie and Wadia Khursheed (2014): UK Feminista: Young women's feminist activism. University of Warwick. MYPLACE (FP7) Project. Accessible at https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/study/cll/about/cllteam/kwadia/myplace_7.1report_uw__ukfeminista.pdf (26. 7. 2017).
- Code, Lorraine (ed.) (2000): *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*. New York: Routledge Press.
- Collins, Patricia Hill (1993): Toward a New Vision: Race, Class and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection. *Race, Sex, and Class* 1 (1): 25–45. Accessible at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41680038> (10. 4. 2016).
- (2002) *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1989): Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. Accessible at <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf> (1. 8. 2017).
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1991): Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241–1299. Accessible at http://socialdifference.columbia.edu/files/socialdiff/projects/Article__Mapping_the_Margins_by_Kimblere_Crenshaw.pdf (7. 4. 2016).
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé (2015): Why intersectionality can't wait. *The Washington Post*, 24. Accessible at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/09/24/why-intersectionality-cant-wait/> (23. 11. 2017).
- Davis, Kathy (2008): Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful. *Feminist Theory* 9 (1): 67–85. Accessible at http://kathydavis.info/articles/Intersectionality_as_buzzword.pdf (5. 4. 2016).
- Dean, Jonathan (2009): Who's Afraid of Third Wave Feminism? On the Uses of the "Third Wave" in British Feminist Politics. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 11 (3): 334–352. Accessible at https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/podzim2012/GEN148/um/B4_pov_DeanJ_WhosAfraidof3rdWaveFeminism_EJFP_2008.pdf (23. 5. 2016).
- Dean, Jonathan and Kristine Aune (2015): Feminism Resurgent? Mapping Contemporary Feminist Activisms in Europe *Social Movement Studies*, 14 (4): 375–395.
- Doetsch-Kidder, Sharon (2012): *Social Change and Intersectional Activism: The Spirit of Social Movement*. Springer.
- Evans, Elizabeth (2015a): *The Politics of Third Wave Feminisms: Neoliberalism, Intersectionality, and the State in Britain and the US*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Evans, Elizabeth (2015b): Intersectionality, Symbolic Representation and Feminist Activism. Draft paper presented to the ECPG Conference, Uppsala, 2015. Accessible at <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/efc72537-05b7-4177-bb9d-54e2dc3dda9a.pdf> (11. 8. 2017).
- Edwards, Rosalind and Janet Holland (2013): What is qualitative interviewing? Accessible at http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/3276/1/complete_proofs.pdf (17. 8. 2017).

- Gordon, Linda (2016): 'Intersectionality', Socialist Feminism and Contemporary Activism: Musings by a Second-Wave Socialist Feminist. *Gender and History* 28 (2): 340-357.
- Gray, Mel and Jennifer Boddy (2010): Making Sense of the Waves: Wipeout or Still Riding High? *Affilia* 25 (4): 368-389. Accessible at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0886109910384069> (30. 5. 2016).
- Hammer, Ronda (2006): "Third Wave Feminism" In Shirley Steinberg, P. Parma, and B. Richard (eds), *Contemporary Youth Culture: An International Encyclopedia*, (2): 510-516. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- in Douglas Kellner (2009): *Third-Wave Feminism, Sexualities, and the Adventures of the Posts. Women, Feminism, and Femininity in the 21st Century: American and French Perspectives*. Accessible at http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-0-230-62131-2_14. (20. 5. 2016)
- Holmes, Mary (2000): Second-wave feminism and the politics of relationships. *Women's Studies International Forum* 23 (2): 235-246. Accessible at <http://www.brown.uk.com/brownlibrary/rel.pdf> (23. 5. 2016).
- Huijg, Dieuwertje Dyi (2012): Tension in Intersectional Agency. A theoretical discussion of the interior conflict of white, feminist activists' intersectional location. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 13 (2): 3-18.
- Jogan, Maca (1990): *Družbena konstrukcija hierarhije med spoloma*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za sociologijo, politične vede in novinarstvo.
- Knudsen, S. (2006): Intersectionality. A Theoretical Inspiration in the Analysis of Minority Cultures and Identities in Textbooks. In Éric Bruillard, Bente Aamotsbakken, Susanne Knudsen, Mike Horsley (eds.), *Caught in the web or lost in the textbook*, 61-76. Caen: Int. Association for Research on Textbooks and Educational Media.
- Lotz, Amanda D. (2003): Communicating Third-Wave Feminism and New Social Movements: Challenges for the Next Century of Feminist Endeavor. *Women and Language* 26 (1). Accessible at <http://sites.lsa.umich.edu/lotz/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/2014/03/WL-3W.pdf> (20. 5. 2016).
- Lutz, Helma (2002): Zonder blikken of blozen. Het standpunt van de (nieuw-) realisten. *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 5 (3): 7-17.
- Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar and Linda Supik (2011): *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Mackay, Finn (2011): A Movement of their own: Voices of Young Feminist Activists in the London. *Feminist Network Interface: A Journal for and About Social Movements*, 3 (2): 152-179.
- May, Vivian (2015): *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Minty, Sarah (2015): *Young People's Attitudes Towards Tuition Fees and Debt in Scotland and England*. Paper Presented as part of a Symposium, Higher education in Scotland and the UK: Diverging or Converging Systems? British Educational Research Association Conference, Queen's University Belfast, 16 September 2015. Accessible at http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/files/21642052/55_i_d_BERA2015_Minty_Paper.pdf (23. 1. 2017).

- Nash, Jennifer C. (2008): Re-thinking Intersectionality. *Feminist Review* 89. Accessible at http://socialdifference.columbia.edu/files/socialdiff/projects/Article__Re-inking_Intersectionality_by_Jennifer_C__Nash.pdf (20. 4. 2016).
- Nicholson, Linda J. (1990): *Feminism - Postmodernism*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Phillips, Ruth and Vivienne Cree (2014): What does the 'Fourth Wave' Mean for Teaching Feminism in the 21st Century Social Work? *Social Work Education* 33 (7): 930-943. Accessible at http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/files/15148557/Phillips_Cree_Fourth_Wave_for_Open_Access.pdf (20. 5. 2016).
- Redfern, Catherine and Kristin Aune (2010): *Reclaiming the F Word*. London: Zed Books.
- Roth, Benita (2004): *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Shields, Stephanie A. (2008): Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective. *Sex Roles*, 59: 301-311.
- Snyder, Claire (2008): What Is Third Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay. *Signs* 34 (1): 175-196. Accessible at http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.1086/588436.pdf?_=1463818661690 (20. 5. 2016).
- Symington, Alison (2004): A Tool For Gender And Economic Justice, Facts and Issues. The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) 9. Accessible at http://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/intersectionality_a_tool_for_gender_and_economic_justice.pdf (4. 4. 2016).
- Vogrinc, Janez (2008): *Kvalitativno raziskovanje na pedagoškem področju*. Ljubljana: Pedagoška fakulteta.
- Worell, Judith (2001): *Encyclopedia of Women and Gender: Sex Similarities and Differences and the Impact of Society on Gender*, vol. I. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira (2006): *Intersectionality and Feminist Politics*. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, SAGE Publications (UK and US), 13 (3): 193-209.

SOURCES

- British Council (2016): *Education UK: The Students' Union*. Accessible at <http://www.educationuk.org/global/articles/students-union/> (16. 5. 2016).
- Cardiff University Student's Union (2016): *National Union of Students*. Accessible at <http://www.cardiffstudents.com/about-cusu/nus/> (16. 5. 2016).
- Conron, Kerith, Emilia Lombardi and Sari Reisner (2014): *Identifying Transgender And Other Gender Minority Respondents on Population-based Surveys: Approaches In J. L. Herman, J. L. (ed.): Best Practices for Asking Questions to Identify Transgender and Other Gender Minority Respondents on Population-Based Surveys, 9-18. Los Angeles: The Williams Institute. Accessible at http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/geniuss-report-sep-2014.pdf (21. 11. 2017).*
- Eurydice (2010): *Razlike med spoloma pri izobraževalnih dosežkih: študija o položaju v Evropi in sprejetih ukrepih*. Accessible at http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/Eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/120SL.pdf (23. 5. 2016).

- Ferko, Tajda (2016): Interseksionalnost in feministični aktivizem, 2016: Študentska feministična društva v Združenem Kraljestvu [datoteka podatkov]. Slovenija, Ljubljana: Tajda Ferko [izdelava], 2016. Slovenija, Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Arhiv družboslovnih podatkov [distribucija], 2017. ADP - IDNo: FEMAKT16. Accessible at <https://www.adp.fdv.uni-lj.si/opisi/femakt16>.
- Haseldon, Lucy and Theodore Joloza (2009): Measuring Sexual Identity: A Guide for Researchers. Accessible at <http://ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/guidance/measuring-sexual-identity-a-guide-for-researchers.pdf> (7. 5. 2016).
- NatCen (2016): Britain Divided? Public Attitudes after seven years of austerity. Accessible at <http://natcen.ac.uk/news-media/press-releases/2016/june/britain-divided-public-attitudes-after-seven-years-of-austerity/> (23. 1. 2017)
- Office for National Statistics (2009): Ethnic group. Accessible at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/ethnic-nat-identity-religion/ethnic-group/index.html#8> (7. 5. 2016).
- The Complete University Guide (2016): University League Table 2017. Accessible at <http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings> 30. 5. 2016).
- The Telegraph (2014): Surge in Student Feminism: Meet the new generation of 'bold, hilarious feminist'. Accessible at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10548692/Student-feminist-societies-surge-Meet-the-new-generation-of-bold-hilarious-feminists.html> (23. 1. 2017).

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS - INTERSECTIONALITY AND STUDENT FEMINISM

1. Please name the Student Feminist Society you're a member of:

2. I am currently enrolled at the University as a:
 - a) Bachelor student
 - b) Master student
 - c) PhD student
3. Which of the following best describes your gender identity?
 - a) Male
 - b) Female
 - c) Trans male/trans man
 - d) Trans female/trans woman
 - e) Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming
 - f) Different identity, please describe
4. Which of the following best describes your sexual identity?
 - a) Heterosexual or Straight
 - b) Gay or Lesbian
 - c) Bisexual

- d) Prefer not to say
 - e) Other, please describe
5. How would you describe your family's social class status?
- a) Working class
 - b) Middle class
 - c) Upper class
6. What is your ethnic group?
- a) White British
 - b) Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups
 - c) Asian/Asian British
 - d) Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
 - e) Other ethnic group, please describe _____
7. What is your religion?
- a) No religion
 - b) Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
 - c) Buddhist
 - d) Hindu
 - e) Jewish
 - f) Muslim
 - g) Sikh
 - h) Any other religion, please describe _____
8. Do you have a disability or learning difficulty?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
- Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements
9. I identify as an intersectional feminist.
- a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neither agree nor disagree
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
10. The feminist society I am a member of is intersectional.
- a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neither agree nor disagree
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
11. The feminist society I am a member of represents a safe space for members of minorities (LGBT, class, ethnic and religious minorities, persons with disabilities)

- a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neither agree nor disagree
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
12. Do you think that when discussing feminism, the 'wave narrative' (First-, Second- and Third-Wave Feminisms) is still relevant today?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) I don't know
13. Have you come across Student Feminist Societies that are related to third-wave feminism?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) I don't know

Source: Ferko (2016).