

Scavenger Hunts & Photo Essays: Helping Students See Inequality in the World around Them through Project-Based Learning

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Introduction & Rationale

A common challenge for instructors who teach undergraduate courses on inequality is convincing students that inequality exists, that it is pervasive, and that it is a social problem rather than a personal issue (see Becker & Paul, 2015; Cebulak & Zipp, 2019; Villa-Nicholas, 2018). Just as feminists have taught us that the personal is political, they have also worked to make the invisible visible (Kleinman et al., 2006; Parrotta & Rusche, 2011). This paper outlines two feminist-informed, project-based learning approaches we have developed to help our students see gender inequality around them and to think critically, sociologically, and intersectionally (Crenshaw, 1990; Hill Collins, 2000) about it. The first assignment asks students to dig deeply into one gender-related issue or inequality that interests them in their immediate surroundings and to create a photo essay that says something about the nature, experience, consequences of, or reaction to that issue or inequality. The second assignment asks students to look broadly at the culture around them and to identify everyday examples of gender inequality by engaging in a gender scavenger hunt. We let students pick which project to work on for the semester. Scavenger hunts and photography-based assignments have been used by instructors to introduce students to peer reviewed journal articles (Lijek & Fankhauser, 2016) and course learning platforms (Jones, 2006), to teach about gender (Hoisington, n.d.), cultural diversity (West & Bauman, 2012), and to sharpen students' critical thinking skills (Eisen, 2012). We contribute to this body of work by expanding these assignments into larger, semester-long, project-based learning (PBL) opportunities while calling on students to apply a critical, feminist-informed, sociological lens.

Our pedagogical approach draws on the identified strengths of inductive, project-based learning, which is associated with deeper conceptual understanding, longer knowledge retention, and stronger problem-solving and reasoning skills, when compared to traditional, lecture-based classes (Bell, 2010; Prince & Felder, 2007; Thomas, 2000). With PBL, projects are central to the curriculum rather than peripheral or added on as an extra, and learning is continuous (Thomas). PBL approaches are also focused on questions or problems that drive students to encounter and wrestle with the central concepts and principles of a discipline (Bell). To encourage students to own their knowledge development, they should have some autonomy in deciding the focus of their projects (Thomas). Finally, to be considered PBL and for students to benefit from this approach, the central pieces of the project must involve the transformation and construction of knowledge (Prince & Felder).

Our approach is also informed by feminist principles, as well as by our routine experiences with students' resistance to learning about inequalities. Like other scholars who teach about social inequality, we often find that the biggest hurdles to learning are students' tendencies to individualize inequality (Copp & Kleinman, 2008) and to be defensive rather than reflexive about their own privileges

(Parrotta & Rusche, 2011). In combination, this can lead students to deny the existence of systems of inequality (Kleinman et al., 2006) and to downplay the social harms they produce (Kleinman & Copp, 2009). The challenge for instructors is to develop teaching strategies that lower students' defenses while helping them see both the systemic nature of sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism (and so on), and the connections between the "isms." Feminism, with its emphasis on reflexivity, positionality, relations of power, and agency, suggests a means of accomplishing these pedagogical goals (Smith, 1987). Rather than teaching "at" students in ways that reinforce power differences in the classroom, PBL approaches empower students to participate as equal partners in the construction, interrogation, and dissemination of shared knowledge. These assignments, in other words, allow students to engage in the uniquely feminist project of "seeing, from where we actually live, into the powers, processes, and relations that organize and determine the everyday context of that seeing" (Smith, p. 9).

In what follows, we outline the learning objectives for two PBL assignments, explain the activities, and discuss how we assess learning.

Student Learning Objectives

Option 1: Using Photo Essays to Dig Deeper into Gender Inequality

- (1) Identify and compile examples of one gender-related issue or inequality that interests you and apply course concepts while analyzing examples.
- (2) Construct and present a photo essay that says something about the nature, experience, consequences of, or reaction to that issue or inequality.
- (3) Demonstrate your ability to discuss the issues reflected in their photos sociologically and intersectionally – both in writing and verbally.
- (4) Evaluate peer projects and presentations and provide constructive feedback.
- (5) Revise and rewrite your photo essay incorporating peer feedback.

Option 2: Using Scavenger Hunts to Take a Broader Look at Gender Inequality

- (1) Look broadly at the culture around you and identify everyday examples of gender and gender inequality and how they intersect with other interlocking dimensions of oppression (Hill Collins, 2000).
- (2) Construct and present a visual record of their findings to share with the class.
- (3) Demonstrate your ability to discuss findings sociologically and intersectionally – both in writing and verbally.

- (4) Evaluate peer projects and presentations and provide constructive feedback.
- (5) Revise and rewrite your photo essay incorporating peer feedback.

Project Explanation

For both project options, students have the option of working individually or in small groups, and they are required to present their findings visually to their peers during a graded roundtable session, discussion board, or video conferencing platform at the end of the semester. They are also required to write an essay that demonstrates their ability to think critically, sociologically, and intersectionally about the issues their projects highlight. Detailed instructions and corresponding grading rubrics are outlined in Appendices A and B.

Option 1: Using Photo Essays to Dig Deeper into Gender Inequality

For Option 1, students will take their own photos to dig deeper into one aspect of gender inequality. Students should start by brainstorming about the kinds of gender-related issues or inequalities they have noticed around them or about organized efforts to challenge, reduce, or draw attention to these issues or inequalities. Next, students will decide what kinds of photos to take to show people something important about this issue or inequality. Students are advised to capture more photos than needed and to later decide which to use in their photo essay.

Option 2: Using Scavenger Hunts to Take a Broader Look at Gender Inequality

For the second option, students will go on a scavenger hunt in their local area. We build on a scavenger hunt activity developed by Hoisington (n.d.) to help students see gender inequality, but we incorporate a more explicitly intersectional lens. Students are asked to locate and photograph or screenshot items such as the following: food or drinks marketed to different demographic groups; a sexist/racist/classist/ableist rule, regulation, or statement in an official document; a romantic movie or TV show in which the woman lead is older than the man. We ask students to photograph or screenshot 25 gender-related items. Students are required to present in the format of their choice (more below) their analyses. After reading classic feminist pieces on social change, including Lorde's (1984) "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," and a chapter from Johnson's (2014) *Unraveling the Gender Knot*, students are asked to identify specific steps they can take in their own spheres of influence to address these issues.

Debriefing

Both of these activities provide opportunities for students to actively engage in the learning process and can be adapted for online asynchronous or synchronous courses. Since the photo essay largely requires individual work, students could be instructed to prepare presentations that they could then share in breakout groups using their university's video conferencing platform. A similar approach could be taken with the scavenger hunt activity. Students could be instructed to develop presentations that they could either prepare to share in small groups or that they could upload into a shared folder in their university's learning management system.

Alternately, the scavenger hunt assignment is well-suited for collaboration if teaching synchronously. Students could be put into breakout groups where they divide up the scavenger hunt items and either search for the items in their own spaces or online. Students could share their screens or provide links in the chat. In a later class period, students could compile the items and make a presentation for the class. If the course is asynchronous, students could complete the scavenger hunt individually and share what they found on discussion boards for their peers to see. Both formats enable students to make connections to sociological concepts and feminist principles in the real world. Instructors should assist in facilitating discussions when appropriate during and after presentations and push students to think further by posting follow up questions on discussion boards.

Assessment

To assess student learning objectives 1, 2, and 3 for both project options, project presentations are evaluated by both peers and the instructor. To provide students opportunities to give each other critical feedback, we provide half slips of paper in face-to-face classes and use discussion boards for online courses asking students to identify two positive things they learned or appreciated about each other's presentation, one thing they could change, expand on, or do better, and one question the presentation raised or something they are still wondering about. Presenters are also asked to evaluate themselves using a similar format, and they are given their peers' evaluations at the end of the roundtable session. The instructor can evaluate this feedback to assess learning objectives 4 and 5.

To assess student learning objectives 3, 4, and 5 for both project options, students are required to submit an essay, to give peer feedback, and can choose to incorporate feedback by revising their photo essays. To challenge hierarchical, top-down evaluation models and to encourage students to see each other as partners in the learning process, we incorporate peer-based feedback in assessing student projects. Reflexivity and revision are central to feminist professional socialization and growth. We have included a few examples from students' projects below (see

Appendix C) and more details on how projects were graded in Appendices A and B. By completing our project-based learning assignments, students were able to develop transferable content analysis and data analysis skills, practice and improve their written and oral presentation skills, and refine their sociological and feminist lenses for examining the world.

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Appendix A

Option 1: Using Photo Essays to Dig Deeper into Gender Inequality

1. There are three goals for this project: 1) to dig deeply into one gender-related issue or inequality that interests you in your immediate surroundings; 2) to create a photo essay that speaks to the nature, experience, consequences of, or reaction to that issue or inequality; 3) to demonstrate your ability to discuss the issues reflected in your photos *sociologically and intersectionally* – both in writing and verbally.
2. **Photos and captions** (25 pts) (6 photos = 4 pts each; 8 photos = 3 pts each) For this project, you will need to take your own photos (You may include up to 2 images from magazines, newspapers, or the internet). Select the 6-8 photos you think best capture what you want others to see about this issue. The photos you select should be related somehow to each other (same type of issue or inequality, members of the same group working to address the issue or inequality, an in-depth profile of a particular person or group experiencing or dealing with the issue or inequality, etc.). Now, create captions for each image to guide viewers through your photos. Decide what message you want to communicate and do so as simply as possible with your captions.
3. **Essay formatting** (10 pts). 6-8 pages, double-spaced; 12-pt, Times Roman font; 1” margins all around; name and project title only at the top of the first page; concepts **bolded** or underlined.
4. **Essay substance** (55 pts) (5 concepts = 7 pts each; class readings = 15 pts; action steps = 5 pts). Explain what your photos show us about the nature, experience, consequences of, or reaction to the gender-related issue or inequality you’ve identified. You should reference class readings liberally throughout your essay and apply at least 5 core concepts from class. Define them precisely. Conclude by describing steps you can take in your own sphere of influence to address this particular gender-related issue or inequality.
5. **Presentation** (10 pts). 5-minutes, prepared, well-organized, accurate, and on-time. Decide how you want to display your photo essay so that your peers can respond to it (poster, booklet, portfolio, digital album). Organize it accordingly. If you decide to use a laptop, you need to bring one with you and check beforehand that your file runs properly.

Appendix B

Option 2: Using Scavenger Hunts to Take a Broader Look at Gender Inequality

1. There are three goals for this project: 1) to look broadly at the culture around you and identify everyday examples of gender and gender inequality, 2) to create a visual record of your findings to share with the class, and 3) to demonstrate your ability to discuss your findings *sociologically and intersectionally* – both in writing and verbally.
2. **Items and gender analysis** (25 pts – 1 pt per item). While your primary focus is on gender inequality, you will also examine its intersections with other inequalities. Locate and collect (or photograph) the following (ensuring that your images include people of different races and ethnicities, social classes, ability levels, ages, and so on):
 1. Food or drinks that are marketed to a) women; b) men; c) wealthy consumers; d) working class consumers.
 2. An organizational statement or press release from a university, corporation, or non-profit addressing racism, sexism, homophobia or transphobia, ableism, or nativism.
 3. A sexist, racist, classist, heterosexist, or ableist rule, policy, or statement in an official document or communication.
 4. A romantic movie or TV show in which a) the woman lead is older than the man lead; b) the couple is interracial; c) the couple is same-gender, same-sex, or polyamorous; d) the couple is differently abled.
 5. A greeting or e-card a) congratulating new adoptive, foster, or single parents; b) acknowledging Father’s or Mother’s Day for a child raised by two mothers or two fathers.
 6. A magazine or website depicting: a) a professional man; b) professional woman; and c) a non-binary professional.
 7. A recruitment poster encouraging a) women to major in or pursue careers in STEM fields; b) men to major in or pursue careers in nursing.
 8. An image of a) a men’s sports team or event at your university; b) a women’s sports team or event at your university; c) a co-ed sports team or event at your university.
 9. Relationship advice from magazines or blogs tailored to a) gay, lesbian, or bisexual young people; b) transgender young people; c) older women; d) older men.

10. One additional item of your choice that applies a course concept you have learned about but not gotten a chance to demonstrate your understanding of with the items above.

Now, label each item using the numbers from the scavenger hunt list. Add a sentence or two of feminist analysis (i.e., explaining how the items demonstrate something sociological and intersectional about gender or gender inequality).

3. **Essay Formatting** (10 pts). 6-8 pages, double-spaced; 12-pt, Times Roman font; 1” margins all around; name and project title only at the top of the first page; concepts **bolded** or underlined.
4. **Essay Substance** (55 pts) (5 concepts = 7 pts each; class readings = 15 pts; action steps = 5 pts). Explain how your items demonstrate how gender and gender inequality operate in our everyday lives. Where do you see intersections with other forms of inequality?

You should reference class readings liberally throughout your essay and apply at least 5 core concepts from class. Define them precisely. Conclude by describing steps you can take in your own sphere of influence to address one particular gender-related issue or inequality you identified in the scavenger hunt.

5. **Presentation** (10 pts). 5-minutes, prepared, well-organized, accurate, and on-time. Decide how you want to display your photo essay so that your peers can respond to it (poster, booklet, portfolio, digital album). Organize it accordingly. If you decide to use a laptop, you need to bring one with you and check beforehand that your file runs properly.

Appendix C

Examples from Student Projects

Figure 1. Photo Essay on the Underreporting of Sexual Assault



"To serve and protect"

Tens of thousands of rape kits go untested across the US.



Figure 2. Photo Essay on the Pink and Blue Syndrome

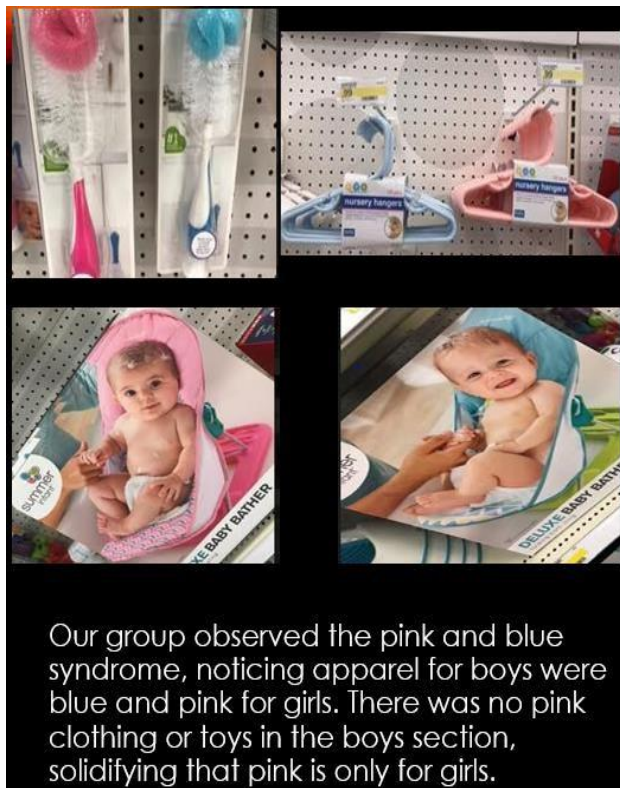


Figure 3. Photo Essay Critiquing the Normalization of Violence Against Women



Source: <https://postmyprank.com/products/happy-ending>

Figure 4. Scavenger Hunt Project: Gendered Food



Trader Joe's Cowboy/Cowgirl Bark.

Separate, but not equal...his is "ruggedly adventuresome."

Figure 5. Scavenger Hunt Project: Sexist Policy in an Official Communication

Dress Attire:

- This is a formal event
- Men should wear a slacks and tie or a suit
- Women should wear a cocktail dress and heels

Email sent to attendees of a university award's ceremony.
Suits and ties for men; dresses and heels for women.