Cultivating lively debate and discussion is at the heart of feminist teaching and scholarship (e.g., Elliot, 1993; Forrest & Rosenberg, 1997; Riger, 1992). Feminist teaching regularly involves hands-on activities, group-based discussions, or collaborative working to explore the nuances and complexities of the psychology of women (Moors, 2020; Pataki & Mackenzie, 2012; Robinson-Keilig et al., 2014). However, following the shift to online teaching prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, engaging students creatively and meaningfully in critical debate and discussion is a key challenge (Fear & Erikson-Brown, 2014). This is due to the negative impact that online teaching has on students’ confidence and sense of voice (Hill & Fitzgerald, 2020), as well as logistical challenges, such as adequate internet access and connectivity issues (e.g., Nordmann et al., 2020; Pownall et al., 2021). These challenges are particularly problematic for large classes, such as introductory psychology lectures (e.g., Crawford et al., 2020). Moreover, the widespread adoption of asynchronous, or pre-recorded rather than live teaching, also adds to the challenge of cultivating engaged feminist debate and discussion in the online classroom. Research demonstrates that asynchronous learning often cultivates lower-level faculty–student interaction (Offir et al., 2008) and does not have the “messy but authentic” value of live sessions (Puhr, 2020, p. 8).

To respond to this pedagogic challenge, in this teaching brief, I share three activities, related to the psychology of women, prejudice, intersectionality, and social constructivism, that I developed and delivered throughout the 2020–2021 academic year. These activities were all delivered asynchronously online to a large first-year undergraduate psychology course. For each activity, I deliver my lecture asynchronously and accompany it with a pre-set Padlet wall, which is designed to be a space that fosters discussion and debate. Padlet (www.padlet.com) is an online discussion platform, which represents a virtual graffiti wall that can be edited in real time to facilitate written activities with large groups (Fuchs, 2014). It is, essentially, the online equivalent of asking students to write ideas on post-it notes in class, before walking around the classroom and reading each contribution. I post prompt questions at the top of the Padlet wall, which stay fixed to the top of the screen, and students are invited to respond to the prompts by posting their responses below the prompts. Students can then leave comments on each other’s responses, like responses via a heart radio button, and leave their own prompts for other students. The platform is free, easily accessible, and intuitive to set up. DeWitt et al. (2015) showed how Padlet is a powerful tool for collaborative learning which students readily engage with, mainly because it reflects the fast-paced, text-based nature of contemporary communication that students are native to (see also Ellis, 2015). Similarly, Mahoney and Hall (2020) suggested that Padlet may be a useful tool in the specific context of engaging students online throughout the COVID-19 context, and Marshall and Kostka (2020) recommended Padlet for a space to cultivate students’ critical thinking online. This resource has been used in previous feminist teaching (Johnstone, 2017).

I set up my Padlet wall ahead of time and give students access to them in the pre-recorded lecture. Then, on the day that the asynchronous lecture is timetabled to go live to students, I monitor the Padlet closely and respond in real time to their ideas and responses. This allows me to prompt, challenge, and ask for further elaboration on students’ responses. I designed these activities to respond creatively and critically to recommendations of using interactive discussion board and debate forums to increase student engagement, meaningful student interactions, and critical thinking (e.g., Lohmann & Boothe, 2020), each with a feminist edge. For each activity, I outline the specific learning objectives and then describe the components of the activity.

**Activity #1: Is That Prejudice? A Job Application**

My first activity was designed as part of an undergraduate Social Psychology module for first-year undergraduate students. The learning objectives of this activity were for students to (a) recognize the role of prejudice in real-world decision-making, (b) understand how prejudice can be both explicit and subtle, and (c) reflect upon their own prejudices and how the existence of in-groups and out-groups informs their own lived experiences. In this activity, I begin my pre-recorded lecture...
on The Psychology of Prejudice by presenting students with a stock-photo line-up of eight people. The line-up includes men and women of all ethnicities, who are all smartly dressed and smiling. I tell students that these people are interview candidates for the job of Psychology Lecturer at their institution (which, coincidentally, was a real job vacancy at the time of the lecture). I explain to students that these eight candidates were scheduled to come into the department for an interview but, due to COVID, the interviews were canceled. Instead, each student must now put themselves into the shoes of the recruiter and decide who they feel will make the best lecturer, using only the candidate’s appearance as justification. Given that this lecture is delivered asynchronously, at this point I invite students to pause the recording, study the images, and consider who they think looks like they will make the best lecturer. I ask students to consider their responses thoughtfully but intentionally give them no further prompts or ideas for how they may wish to justify their decision.

When I deliver this activity in-person, I often invite students to discuss their thought process with students sitting around them in the lecture. The lecture hall typically rumbles with ideas, discussion, and debate as students grapple with the task of making a social decision based on little information. I wanted to maintain as much of this thoughtful, excited discussion as I could in an asynchronous online setting. Therefore, in order to facilitate debate and discussion online, in my pre-recorded lecture I asked students to share their decision (including a description of their decision-making process) on a Padlet wall which accompanies the lecture recording. Once students have posted their response, I continue the lecture by asking students to think about the social information they use to guide this judgment. I then provide them with information related to the existence of gendered, racial, and structural in-groups and out-groups, before asking students to consider whether their selected candidate was a member of their own in-group.

Finally, I prompt students to consider, by way of posting in the Padlet wall, whether the process of selecting a candidate based purely on their in-group membership is inherently problematic and whether it constitutes prejudice, in their view. Students then typically respond by discussing on the Padlet wall whether there is a difference between group preference and explicit prejudice, which is often a useful and lively discussion. Then, to contextualize this asynchronous discussion, in my lectures I provide students with background information on gender-based prejudice, intergroup bias, and in-group/out-group differences. For example, I share research which shows the nuances of how representation can inform intergroup gender biases (e.g., Rudman & Goodwin, 2004) and try to demonstrate how this task may show how equal representation on hiring panels may negate some prejudices. I then encourage students to reflect upon how they made their initial decision and ask them to consider how the in-group and out-group distinction can inform real-world decision-making, including in students’ everyday lives.

I have found that it is useful to explore with students whether subtle or unintentional prejudice toward out-groups constitutes real prejudice (e.g., Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997), before explaining how these kinds of intergroup bias can be harmful for groups experiencing prejudice. I find this task useful to unpack some of the nuances of prejudice research, which allows me to prompt students to move beyond the superficial notion that prejudice is merely pre-judging. By prompting students to consider what they would do and asking them to make a decision and share this with their classmates, I am able to demonstrate how prejudice is not necessarily explicit hatred of out-groups. It can be insidious, unconscious, and even well-intentioned. I find this valuable as many students enter college with a belief that prejudice is predominantly an activity that is done by bad people to good people. This kind of role playing pedagogy has been used successfully in other contexts, such as teaching about racial prejudice (McGregor, 1993). Ultimately, this exercise provides space for reflection to critically examine assumptions regarding the definition of prejudice, with the goal of facilitating a more nuanced and critical appreciation of prejudice research. This activity is thus useful for prompting students to confront their own biases in a context that emulates real-world decision-making, while also opening up a conversation about prejudice, in-groups, and out-groups. I find that by letting students grapple with their use of intergroup bias to guide decision-making, this provides fertile ground to then tackle the mainstream social psychology literature on group bias, prejudice, and, later, discrimination. As I explain to students, development of these kinds of critical thinking skills are key tools in their feminist psychology toolkit (Forrest & Rosenberg, 1997).

Activity #2: Whose Voice Is Missing? Find the Missing Psychologists

I use a similar setup in my teaching of first-year undergraduate students during an introductory lecture delivered during the first week of classes in a History of Psychology module. This activity is designed to introduce students to a feminist appraisal of the history of psychology so that students can (a) develop their feminist critical thinking skills, (b) gain a more comprehensive understanding of psychology’s history, and (c) practice the act of reflecting upon their own experiences and how these relate to the content that they are taught in their psychology program. In this lecture, I begin by introducing students to the early days of psychology, covering the classics such as Freud, Wundt, Locke, Watson, and Skinner. I cover this content primarily uncritically, presenting students with information related to each of the psychologists’ ideas and contributions to mainstream psychology. I then challenge students with another prompt for a Padlet wall discussion: “What do these psychologists have in common? Whose voice is missing?” As a further hint to engage students with realizing the danger of a single story, I play the introductory section of
Ngozi Adichie’s (2009) TedTalk while they provide their thoughts on the Padlet.

Once students have considered the missing psychologists of psychology’s history (Rutherford et al., 2010), I continue, as with Activity 1, to post follow-up comments to students’ ideas, asking questions such as “You’ve noted that I didn’t include any women psychologists—why is this a problem?” or “What is the danger of only studying men?” I find that this allows me to really engage students with a higher level of critical thinking, where they are prompted to articulate why gender representation and voice are important. I finish the asynchronous lecture by offering a reclaimed version of psychology’s history, explaining concepts such as the domination of male voices in mainstream psychology (Crawford & Marecek, 1989), androcentrism or male-centrism (e.g., Bailey et al., 2019), and the value of women and minoritized groups’ contribution to the study of psychology (Thompson, 2017).

I teach students about notable feminist psychologists and their contribution to psychology’s history, present, and future, an approach that was inspired by Ball et al. (2013). These psychologists were obtained from the Psychology’s Feminist Voices Women Past, an important feminist pedagogic resource for teaching the history of women’s contribution to psychology (Ball et al., 2013). I then encourage students to pause the lecture and browse the Psychology’s Feminist Voices Presence Profiles (https://feministvoices.com/presence), an online repository of over 100 profiles of feminist researchers, which include detailed biographies, selected work, and contribution to psychology. I encourage students to share any profiles of psychologists that particularly caught their attention in the Padlet and teach peers about the contribution of their chosen feminist psychologist. This task can also be used to highlight the missing voices of people of color and non-Western people in psychology, by using other online resources such as Jankowski’s (2021) BME Psychology teaching resource (https://bmepsychology.com). Overall, this task allows me to encourage students to share ideas and engage in scholarly discussion in an asynchronous online teaching context, while also acquainting students with the historical lineage that has shaped contemporary feminist psychology.

Activity #3: “This Is Me.” Constructions of the Self

I designed this last activity as part of a Constructions of the Self lecture in a Social Psychology module. The learning objectives of this activity were for students to (a) continue fostering their critical thinking skills, (b) develop an appreciation of social constructivism and alternatives to the positivist paradigm that dominates social psychology, and (c) critically appraise how social identities intersect to construct the self. At the start of the lecture, before I have yet covered any lecture content, I invite students to consider how they would respond if I asked them to “Write a short bio about yourself.” Following a brief moment of pause and reflection, I then ask students to open their phones and venture through their social media platforms. In most social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and TikTok), account holders may write a short biography on their individual profiles. I ask students to think critically about the function of their written biographies: “Do your social media bios differ by platform? Are you the ‘same person’ on LinkedIn as you are on Twitter? How did/would you construct your biography? What information did/would you like to communicate to other people?” Students then provide short responses that grapple with critical appreciation of social identity in context. I then use this opening biography activity to demonstrate to students how the concept of identity or the self is actively and socially constructed online (Güdüz, 2017; Hilsen & Helvik, 2014) and later invite students to consider how gendered identity, or “gendered selves,” may be negotiated online in unique ways (Cook & Hasmath, 2014). Importantly, I use this initial example of constructions of the self in social media profiles to then consider more nuanced aspects of the self as a social construction more broadly. For example, I then cover topics such as McConnell’s (2011) multiple self-aspects framework, which posits that “the self” comprises multiple, context-bound selves, each with their own ascribed attributes and traits. This leads to a Padlet discussion about the nature of multiple selves, which gives way to a section of the lecture dedicated to addressing and understanding intersectionality. I explain to students how while we may have “different” identities in different contexts, we also have intersecting identities. I describe the etiology of Crenshaw’s (1989, 1991) intersectionality and explain its roots in Black feminist praxis, which again echoes the danger of “telling a single story” that features in Activity 2 (Naples, 2016).

However, because this is a very introductory lecture that features early in the students’ undergraduate journey, I was conscious that I did not want to fall into the tendency of confusing intersectionality with the interplay between personal identity and structural identities (Rosenthal, 2016). Therefore, I invite students to engage with the nuances of intersectionality by reading Rosenthal’s (2016) paper on intersectionality in psychology as a means of promoting social justice and equity. I set up a section on Padlet for students to discuss this article, as an online reading group, again, in efforts to cultivate the spontaneous debate and discussion and recommendations from other educators. These recommendations are informed by both my own experiences of using Padlet in the context of feminist debate and discussion and recommendations from other
educators on best practice in online discussion forums (Aloni & Harrington, 2018):

Ensure that discussion prompts are open-ended. I have found that students engage well when the prompts I provide to students are crafted to encourage well-developed, thoughtful responses. For example, in one lecture I made a Padlet wall that featured the prompt “Do you think that psychology is a science?” and many students responded with closed yes/no responses, which did not inspire much discussion and debate. As Howell et al. (2017) also stressed, online discussion walls, such as those facilitated via Padlet, can foster high-level critical thinking, particularly when the prompts provided by the lecturer are well-considered, suitably provocative, and thought-provoking. This can be achieved by utilizing creative prompts (e.g., initiating role playing and debates), visual stimulus (e.g., videos and photos), and posing critical questions (see also Aloni & Harrington, 2018).

Respond actively to students’ comments and post follow-up questions. I have found that even short comments such as “Interesting point, I agree. What do others think?” can be really useful at stimulating discussion and encouraging participation. This also signals to students that I am receptive to their comments and engaged in the discussion too, which can encourage student engagement (Cranney et al., 2011). Similarly, to indicate the end of the discussion, I like to provide a summary of the discussion in a post on the Padlet wall, to remind students of what we have discussed and to demonstrate that I am actively listening and responding to their ideas. This practice of summarizing conversation has been noted as a useful pedagogical tool by other educators too (e.g., Wang et al., 2011).

Provide alternative ways to participate. As other pedagogical scholars have noted throughout a range of contexts, the spectrum of student engagement is vast (Bryson & Hand, 2007). Therefore, it is useful to provide students with a range of ways to engage in the Padlet wall or discussion board. One way that I have found useful is to encourage students who may feel less comfortable in sharing their own thoughts openly to engage with the discussion is to upvote other students’ comments. This indicates that they are actively participating in the conversation without the need to post their own ideas independently. As Jacobi (2017) noted, students respond well when they can see other students’ supporting or engaging with their posts on discussion boards.

Consider how to use timing as a pedagogical tool. Some activities, such as the job application exercise shared here, are designed to capture students’ immediate responses to questions or stimuli and are most effective when students provide their thoughts in real time without a large amount of time to think and reflect first. This can be particularly useful for activities that aim to demonstrate to students how their initial reaction or response to class material may then change following deeper critical thinking and learning. However, for other activities, such as my Whose Voice Is Missing activity, it is more useful for students to have sufficient time to gather their thoughts and be prepared to provide their responses in class. Therefore, it is useful to consider how the timing of sharing a Padlet wall, or other online discussion board, may elicit different kinds of responses from students. This can also help to establish the goal and purpose of the Padlet wall, which is important given that mismatched expectations about purpose is a core barrier to engagement in online discussion boards (Cheung & Hew, 2005).

Openly explain to students the importance of non-sexist, inclusive language. In the context of teaching, discussing, and debating feminist topics in psychology, it is important to ensure that the flow, structure, and content of accompanying online discussions are reflective of feminist calls for inclusion and respect. This can sometimes be a challenge, particularly when it comes to demonstrating to students nuances of language use in a feminist teaching context. For example, in some of my Padlet walls that centered around prejudice, the terms sex and gender were often used interchangeably which, at times, was problematic for the constructiveness of the discussion. This can be a useful teaching moment to explain wider debates and discussion in feminist psychology. To negate this, it may be useful to first briefly cover the American Psychological Association (2020) guidelines for the use of non-sexist language with students.

Other Pedagogical Online Tools

While I have focused here on Padlet as one pedagogical online tool, it is important to note that there are many other freely accessible tools and platforms that can host similar interactive exercises. For example, a similar interaction may be achieved through shared Google Docs with students; Zhou et al. (2012) showed how Google Docs can be a useful platform for out-of-class collaborative writing. Similarly, this approach can be applied to other virtual learning environments or even closed Facebook groups, as others have used (e.g., DiVall & Kirwin, 2012). Looking forward to the next academic year, I plan to continue this structure of asynchronous lecture, coupled with the opportunity to engage more interactively on a Padlet wall, and look forward to attempting more challenging and higher-level teaching content in this space. Similarly, the kind of approach that I have adopted here can also be readily applied to other online contexts, or indeed can be adapted to suit an in-person teaching context. For example, when teaching in the classroom, the prompts that are shared on a Padlet wall, or indeed other virtual platform, could instead be displayed to students using posters and post-it notes. Therefore, there is scope for creative applications of this pedagogical approach, as a method to inspire and challenge students on critical feminist topics in psychology and beyond.
Conclusion

In this teaching brief, I have shared three activities that I developed solely for the unique context of asynchronous teaching delivery in the COVID-19 pandemic. The broad structure of each is a pre-recorded asynchronous lecture with an accompanying Padlet wall in which students can interactively discuss and debate their responses to the prompts given in the lecture. I designed these activities to foster engagement in the classroom, specifically by prompting students to engage with the critical, creative nature of feminist thinking. Student feedback was overwhelmingly positive for these lectures. Across module feedback at the end of the semester, students commented on how they “loved being able to get their teeth into the content on Padlet,” found it “so important to hear about feminism in the lecture,” and described the interactivity across the asynchronous lectures as “so engaging,” “brilliant,” and “fascinating.” Another student noted that the Constructions of the Self lecture was “the best lecture I’ve had since I’ve started university.” I hope this teaching brief will be useful in encouraging others to consider how to translate their feminist pedagogy online.

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