Parker, B., Brady, J., Power, E & Belyea, S. Feminist Food Studies: Intersectional Perspectives. Toronto, ON. (2019). 287 pages, \$64.95 (softcover), ISBN: 9780889616097

Review by Kori Kostka, RD, MHSc (cand.)

Feminist Food Studies is a commendable exploration of the complexity of *intersectionality perspectives* that provides a collection of 22 feminist food studies scholars who call to the surface the need to discuss oppression and privilege in daily food practices. The definition of intersectionality stems from the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, the racialized sexism of black women in the workplace (1989, 1991), a definition that influences how Davis (2008) defines intersectionality “the 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.”

The forward opens with a quote from D. Carbado et al., “No particular application of intersectionality can, in a definitive sense, grasp the range of intersectional powers and problems that plague society. This work-in-progress understanding of intersectionality suggests that we should endeavor, on an ongoing basis, to move intersectionality to unexplored places.” This forward provides a platform for how food can not only explore, but advance social justice work, yet credits that much of this work remains unexplored. This book serves as a petition to food studies community to engage in more and continuous intersectional work, and recognizes this work is dynamic based on shifting identities and experiences.

Feminist food studies is explained to be intersectional, that it is not just limited to oppression and privilege, but also gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, religion, and age and how each of these influence one’s relation to food.

Historical, social, cultural, economic, environmental, political, and transnational contexts further perpetuate the social injustice sides of food, including production, distribution, consumption and more. This awakens the misconception that feminist food scholars are only limited to women and girls and brings forth the political challenge to providing a “clear-cut” definition of this work. As the reader, it heightens one’s knowledge of the complexity of food relationships, which will help to embody ways to add more intersectional approaches to one’s work.

The book starts with a missing told history of women’s (both black and white) contributions to food studies; a discussion of power, privilege and inequality; and invites marginalized voices to the table. An ethnographic study then shares with the reader an nonhuman (bugs, beetles and bees) critical axis of oppression, an intersectional approach to our food system. Next the work of black vegan feminist scholars is built on through an exploration of vegan blogs by addressing the racialized, classed and gendered influences of veganism that perpetuate the individual responsibility of healthy eating.

An exploration of queerness and veganism is provided using soy because of its ties to femininity and a healthist food culture. Also discussed are the ethical dilemmas of eating that are likely impossible to fulfill, yet can be joyful in the pursuit of trying if not complicit to normative food relations and substance-based food politics.

A discussion of how weight-based discrimination and the intersections of other forms of oppression and discrimination is offered, highlighting the need to end fat

bias, a form of social injustice. The patriarchal influences of online technology use of Weight Watchers through “masculine” and “feminine” beliefs exposes how these messages portray differently to female and male dieters. A religious discussion of Indian and Pakistani (Desi) Muslim women use food to maintain their identities and the impact of political influences, important for anyone working with new immigrants or marginalized racial or ethnic groups.

Celebrity chef culture and pop culture is explored by using the popular meme turned Twitter hashtag, “the struggle plate” as a means to uncover the intersection of black food culture with the politics of race, gender, class and nationality. A qualitative interview of low income mothers' untangles the gender, race and class influence that shapes engagement and food practices. Although it is noted Indigenous voices are not adequately included in this volume, there is an analysis of the book *Birdie* by Tracey Lindberg, recognizing how food is part of memory and reinforces cultural values, yet it is challenged by a food system that denies, withholds, restricts access to lands thereby disrupting Indigenous nations.

An intersectional analysis with an original analytic framework explores a food exhibit in the Immigration Museum, Melbourne, Australia. A discussion of multiculturalism and how it is defined through race, gender, and class is provided and shown how it is misrepresented in food exhibits, reinforcing inequality and discrimination. Finally this book closes with a critical analysis, using fermentation, to discuss how we are not in control, we are interdependent, we are messy and complex and how feminist food studies and self-reflexivity may help us better relate to each other ethically.

This book would be a great companion to any food or women's studies and for any nutrition professionals looking to understand the political and social influences through intersectionality and social justice lenses that further complicate our relation to food. Kudos to these food studies scholars for providing the readers with definitions and practical representations of everyday influences of marginalization, privilege and power so that the reader may contribute and change social injustice in their work.

References:

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Author Bio

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