‘They’ve never been taught what feminism is’: the case for teaching feminism, gender issues, and related topics in school.

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Introduction

Laura: to start off I just kind of wanted to get a sense of your interests actually, um you said that you’re a student, I’m just wondering if you can tell me what you’re studying and why you chose that subject

Tamara: I’m a student at {university in city} and I’m studying business and I chose business because um I’ve always loved real estate, mainly like real estate investment because that’s what my dad does and I have always been interested in that ever since- he just started his company a few years ago, and ever since he started that I’ve always- it’s always kind of been my dream to do that as well or something within that industry, so I knew that business was the route I wanted to take

L: ok super. And um, maybe related, is there anything you would say you are particularly passionate about?

T: um I played soccer, really uh high-level competitive soccer up until, well I actually played in University for the first bit and then it just got too much so, there’s soccer and then now just like I’m really in to fitness just like in general like health and fitness and yeah those are my passions I’d say

L: ok super, thanks for for sharing. Um so I’ll move on to kind of my main set of questions. Um so to start off I’m just wondering um what comes to mind when you hear the word feminism?

T: um that makes me think of [pause 3.66] like [pause 4.55] people that are [pause 3.34] um really [pause 3.9] like like pro women, like really like yeah, really in to like supporting women and um helping women be strong and I don’t know just like giving them a voice and making them super powerful and stuff um making sure that they’re not over like overtaken I guess by like men, like making sure that they’re equal to men, or letting them do things that maybe wasn’t acceptable before like in the past like just in general like working and stuff like obviously like feminists would have like or not necessarily feminists but like as like a mild example like people trying to get women to just be more involved equally and like jobs and stuff that men and women can both do now so like I don’t know [shrug] stuff like that I guess. I don’t really know a lot about these terms honestly [laughter] but yeah

L: no, that’s ok, that’s great. Um can I ask you to just keep going, what more can you say about it

T: um I’d say that it’s it’s maybe a bit more extreme than just trying to make things like equal it’s maybe people that feel like they are being that like people think that men are superior so they want to make sure that that’s not the case and that women are also just as good as men, so I don’t know. Some- sometimes like like I guess there’s like protestors and stuff, I’ve heard of that type of thing happening but yeah I don’t know that’s pretty much like to the extent that I’ve like known about that [laughter]

L: ok super. Um my questions are a bit related so I’m going to keep going on the same theme, but I’m wondering um if there’s any particular feminist or like gender issues that come to mind

T: I haven’t experienced any through my life obviously like I’ve seen lots on TV um not really like I haven’t followed them closely so I don’t know exactly like the cases um but I’ve never personally had any experiences or known of anybody that’s had experiences of anything to do with like feminism I guess wait was the question again?

L: sure yeah um just if you had any particular issues, gender issues or issues that feminists might be concerned about that come to mind

T: oh ok- oh what feminists would be concerned about, oh I see ok um probably [pause] like again like I said like it’s not really an issue today but like before like when there were certain jobs that were like like jobs that “men” would do, but like now women do them too. And then I feel like for example um people just like in general thinking that men are better at running, men are better at- and I personally think they are [laughter] like I, I don’t know, I don’t see like I haven’t had any problems with it I guess so um yeah but like in general just maybe that men are supposed to be stronger physically stronger and stuff and women are sometimes like people sometimes would perceive women as like weaker I guess in general but that’s, that’s pretty much all I can think of for that

L: ok super. Um and in terms of kind of the history of feminism or feminist movements um did you learn about that at all, either in school or from somewhere else?

T: I I honestly we really didn’t learn about that. I really wish that we did learn about that in school cause I find that’s so much more interesting than some of the stuff that we did learn about um but yeah we never like really learned about that. Like in, I feel like that’s something we could have learned about in social studies when we were in elementary school even and stuff or in high school. But yeah I never- none of my classes like English classes, none of them ever went over that sort of thing. Other than the fact that I’ve just heard that like again in the past women kind of were supposed to stay at home and I think like honestly this is like from reading books and stuff probably when I was younger, my mom read books to me, and like just knowing that women weren’t really supposed to leave the house, at least like they had to cover up in a lot of places if they were going to leave, not in- like not here but in a lot of countries or I don’t even know where, but I just remember I just remember that particular situation. Um yeah and the men were the ones that would go to work and they would come home and the woman would cook and have the kids all fed and washed and ready for bed and stuff and they would kind of stay home and the men would be always the ones that would go out so um yeah. [pause]

L: sorry I keep nodding [laughing] I’m not sure if you can see me

T: yeah yeah I can see you

L: um I’m wondering um why do you think it was that feminism wasn’t taught um in schools, like you mentioned it could have been taught in social studies, why do you think it wasn’t really touched on, would you say?

T: I am honestly not sure I just know like we spent a lot of time on things like the First Nations and stuff and mayb- I don’t know why like I wish again that we had spent more time on feminism and problems like that that were more related to like everyone but we really learnt a lot about like we really spent probably most of our time on just the indigenous people in high school and even in elementary school. And I think maybe just because BC is like that’s a lot of BC’s history and even Canada’s history but like I don’t know, other than that I can’t think of why they didn’t put it in to our curriculum, um other than them maybe wanting to really like reinforce just like the indigenous um history. But yeah maybe because maybe because they like didn’t see it as a problem as much as again the indigenous, which I don’t think it true but I don’t know, I don’t know, that’s a good question about why they didn’t

L: mmm um is the um indigenous like learning about that in school is that quite a recent thing do you know

T: yeah, it is, for sure. Like I talked to my parents about it cause I- it just seemed like a lot and like the details that they would go in to were pretty like disturbing too um like the videos they made us watch and stuff [L: oh ok] and uh so like I would talk to my parents about it and they never had to watch stuff like that or learn that much detail, it’s definitely like a newer thing. And I’ve talked to my cousins like and all their schools and stuff and they’re all like yeah it’s the same thing like we had to watch the same like this movie and it was showing like all the kids in the residential schools like getting beaten to death and stuff and starved to death and yeah so um for some reason like they are really wanting to reinforce that issue and make that like the main issue because they literally never went over feminism. Maybe as like a term, as a definition like that would probably like that’s all I remember being ever like nothing more than that, so

L: mm ok

T: yeah

L: and just something you said a little bit earlier about how um like it would have been maybe cool to learn about it instead of maybe some other topics, what would you have wanted to drop maybe if you if you had to, like what do you think was less interesting

T: well I mean like in social studies, that’s where we learned a lot about the indigenous community, I found like I honestly don’t know um like geography well enough like I wished they introduced that more in and just like learning about the world in general and Canada, more like location-wise like yeah exactly like geography but I and then again yeah things like feminism like broad issues, like like broadly going over all these issues instead of so intensely going into one specific issue, I think I think that would I think that would be better just because again like I really don’t like I feel like I know more about the indigenous community than I do about like where places are in the world, or again terms like feminism. Which is like it’s good for us to learn about indi- the indigenous community and what the past is, but I think that they could have done a better job of yeah maybe dropping some of that some of the detail at least of that and the movies and stuff that they would make us watch, and adding in some more of the other things that happened like feminism because I really don’t know much about that

L: mmm mk. Um and again this is gonna feel like a—

T: and and another one sorry another one that they didn’t go over and I just know about cause I read a book on it is like the slavery in Canada too like the Blacks and stuff I found that interesting and that was something that was really never talked about much at all either

L: mm yeah yeah same with me, I mean I was yeah in school um in high school maybe 16 years ago [laughter] and we didn’t learn about indigenous either which which I think is important and I know that they’re pushing that but um it sort of seems like it’s overly saturated now

T: yeah yeah

L: and like maybe sort of a good moderation would be good

T: exactly

L: um so again this is going to seem like a hard question but I’m just wondering sort of, kind of thinking about feminism and it is sort of associated with the pursuit or with achieving gender equality, um why would you say that men and women haven’t been equal, like historically

T: um maybe because [pause] I think [pause] I feel like maybe because men were more capable back then and women, I think women like didn’t maybe know their capabilities and I’m not I’m not sure. I feel like maybe there was men that felt maybe it was the men that felt that the women shouldn’t be able to go and do these things and that their job was just to have the children and take care of the household and things like that and so maybe maybe it was from the men’s side of the story that like yeah maybe it was because of the men’s view on things that maybe the women just kind of took a step back and, not that they were ever that step forward, but just never really tried to do more and I guess they were content and happy and that’s just what they all did so that’s what they thought was right. And then I think as people nowadays have started standing up for other things more like slowly and just in general like people have started speaking out more and stuff then issues like feminism have kind of slowly started to get more aw- like people have been more aware of it and obviously [laughter] women work now all the time and I know that was something that was not really common um in the past, so yeah I think I think I feel like maybe it like was a mix of women just thinking that was normal, like we think our lives right now are normal and maybe in the future we’ll look back and think oh that’s so weird that we did things that way um but [laughter] but also I feel like maybe it was the men thinking because they had more power and because they and I know like, again this is just from movies and books I’m thinking back to because we never learnt anything in school really, I don’t know if this is true 100% but also sometimes the men would get like very aggressive and stuff, so the woman wouldn’t want to try to like ever speak up, and they would just know to kind of do what like their job entitled the which was just like taking care of family, and like they would never try to do anything with business or like leave the leave the house and go get a job just because the men thought that was like their responsibility I think and yeah I think that the women maybe were almost scared in some situations too because like again, I don’t know if this is really true but just like see like that the men could get like very angry and aggressive, so I don’t know, maybe like in some cases that was the case possible. Yeah

L: mmm ok. So in a sense it sort of sounds like you’re saying because men and again you sort of mentioned their strength earlier, um sort of their strength and aggressiveness maybe has led to this in- unequal balance.

T: mhm and maybe they weren’t even so like aggressive but that’s just how women perceived all men, and and because like that’s how everybody thought of them, it just became this [pause] like like idea that that’s how that’s how maybe that they would be treated if they were to speak up or whatever. I don’t know, that’s just thinking back to movies and books like I said cause I really have never yeah been taught or told anything about the past and feminism unfortunately

L: no that’s interesting, um so it sounds like you’ve kind of come across some of these like issues and stuff um through books and and movies and you mentioned also your mom as well?

T: well just like her like reading books to me or whatever when I was little but yeah just books and movies are the only two places

L: ok

T: well and like when we were reading the book I’d like ask my mom questions and she’d explain stuff to me like that cause she likes reading books about like older like books about the past and like history like stuff that happened before, so I guess she knows a little about that type of thing, yeah

L: and so then it sounds like you would talk—

T: those are the only places that I would find information from though

L: ok, so it’s not like something you’d talk about with friends or or other family or anything

T: no no not usually

L: um and I’m just wondering if there are any feminist figures or women that come to mind in particular, either from the past or currently

T: um again like I really like in my family, I wouldn’t say I have any feminist friends or family like anyone really advocating for it but I think that like we’re all happy with how we’re being treated by like the mens in our lives. I don’t think that there’s anyone I can think of that’s like a big name like historically, or even currently that would be well-known, I don’t again, cause I haven’t really been taught anything like that so yeah I don’t really know anybody [pause] yeah

L: ok. I’m going to switch gears a little bit. I’m wondering if you’ve heard of the Me Too movement um and if yes, what you can tell me about it

T: I’ve heard about it and I- my dad actually [laughter] told me about it I think um like I think he saw something on the news about it but and then he explained to me what it was, but I honestly forget what that was

L: mm ok, that’s ok

T: yeah

L: um it sort of it broke out in October 2017 um on a widescale on social media and it was linked with the allegations of um sexual harassment and assault in Hollywood um against uh Harvey Harvey Weinstein, and then it was an actress Alyssa Milano who wrote on Twitter like if you know women who’ve experience this could kind of let the world know that then we would see how prevalent this is. And so then women started tweeting me too and saying their experiences and their stories as well um and I think you would have been quite young I guess maybe 16 or so when it broke out, um I’m just wondering if you remember at all any teachers or anyone in school talking about it

T: um no, not in school. Again the only person I heard that from was my honestly my dad I think told me like explained to me what it was because I think I was asking about it yeah

L: ok, and would you have maybe wanted teachers to talk about it or do you think it was appropriate for them not you?

T: yeah, I think that sort of stuff is interesting, because it’s like current events and stuff like that, like I really liked learning about that because I felt it was relevant to my life and anybody’s life in my generation, I think that sort of stuff is really interesting and would be really useful to to know and yeah, it would have been good knowledge to gain instead of some of the other past stuff maybe, I think if we spent more time on current things I think that would have been better

L: mm ok. Um I’m wondering if um in like sex education or maybe in another I don’t know what they call it now, like personal health class or whatever [laughter] um did they talk about um like consent or healthy relationships um at all, do you remember?

T: yeah they talked about consent and healthy relationships yeah like how like even before you kiss somebody [laughter] you’re technically supposed to ask for consent and obviously anything past that you’d have to ask consent for too um so they did talk about that and they talked about yeah healthy relationship like knowing what a healthy relationship is and when to get out- although there was only like one class, I literally only remember like one class really going like actually seriously talking about it um which I think like and I know that it something to do with my school year like I think usually they come in three times but instead she only came in once like it’s like a particular lady from {region} and she goes to all the schools but I’m not sure maybe she came in twice but yeah I think it was just one or two times. Even three times which is what I think she would usually come in for, I don’t think like that was quite enough cause there was still like I don’t know just like in general like again, it’s more of a current thing, like something for everybody like it affects like your lives daily and stuff, I think that would have been a really important class to go to go into deeper in

L: mm um and the class that you did have, um do you think that students were um like receptive and taking it seriously or or not so much?

T: um no I-well [pause] like were was definitely some kids that were like joke-y like some boys that were joking around and goofing off like usually like the funny the funny like guys that usually would obviously were joking around, cause this is like when I was like really young like grade 6 or 7, I think it was grade 6 even. Um so you have like that group usually, and then but then I think like the girls the girls definitely took it seriously and obviously some maybe some guys did but I do remember the girls like actually like taking it seriously and stuff yeah. Like I know the girls like some of my friends would talk about saying how they wished they had split it up into like girls and then boys in a different class or like having like two separate time zones- two separate time like sessions um, like I didn’t really mind it but I guess uncomfortable having the boys in the class to talk about that in class in grade 6 but they yeah in my class they just did it like all of us together and again it was only one or two classes for like it was only like an hour too so yeah we didn’t really like and then like after the lady comes in she leaves and that’s like the end of that, there’s no- we didn’t doing any like reflection on it or anything so, again like to remember it all is also difficult

L: mmm yeah and to not have it kind of repetitive in from 6 and 7 I think it’s good to introduce it early but then to repeat it after as you become teenagers and-

T: yeah exactly

L: get it again yeah

T: yeah so stuff wasn’t super important back then

L: [laughter]

T: cause it was like interesting but it wasn’t really relevant to my life at that time

L: and I’m just wondering, at {university} do you notice um any kind of campaigns around um consent or anything about sexual violence or harassment or anything?

T: uh I’ve only seen like one really like campaign and it wasn’t about that, I don’t really remember what it was it was it wasn’t about like feminism or anything like that, it was a different issue completely. I think it was an environmental issue. Um and yeah there was only one I saw. I lived like I didn’t live on campus so I wasn’t around campus a lot, I would just go to my classes and leave kind of thing um but yeah I didn’t see any- there probably was some and I’m sure that there was like some clubs and stuff you could get involved in but nothing that like I ever really recognized

L: ok um and then other than the hashtag MeToo, I’m just wondering if any other hashtags come to mind at all

T: no I couldn’t tell you have that have come to mind

L: mhm and um what do you think about um activism on social media generally, whether feminist issues or not

T: I think it’s good, I think that if you I think it’s good if it’s people that actually like are putting out the right information and know what they’re talking about um I mean I think like I have some friends some like close family friends who post a lot about mainly like environmental issues and stuff but sometimes it can get like a little bit excessive and I’m worried just that people will stop listening to her just because she posts so much. So I think like the proper amount is also important um but but like I think like and she she is quite like up to like she knows about these issues like she’s very interested in them she knows what she’s talking about but I think that people who maybe don’t know what they’re talking about and say stuff that’s not true like should just do more research and find out more information before they post stuff. But I think in general like as long as it’s for a good cause like for yeah for a good I I don’t have a problem with it. I like like I like it, I have personally never posted anything about any sort of campaign, just because again I really feel like I don’t know enough to post about it, I don’t know enough about anything um and nothing’s really hit close to home to me before, I’ve never had any issues about anything that I’d campaign about um and it’s, or I haven’t had any friends or anything. And again maybe if I did have personal issues or had friends I would know more about it or learnt it in school I’d know more about it but just like in general yeah like I I think it’s great if you know what you’re talking about and again like if it’s the right amount not like too much cause again like that friend I was talking about, I think she’s just posting maybe too much now because I’m just worried that people will start to not listen to her because it’s so so much but she actually has good information that she’s putting out there so yeah just like proportion and yeah

L: ok to get people- kind of to raise awareness but not to kind of over saturate um yeah beat it to death [laughter]

T: yeah

L: um there’s just something that I remembered that I wanted to come back to that you said earlier about the Me Too movement and about how it would have maybe been helpful for um maybe that to have been talked about in school and that you said it was sort of more relevant um can you just explain what you meant by that?

T: well it’s much more relevant because it’s about first of all like it’s it’s an issue or a concern that is relevant to my generation, relevant meaning like it’s happening and it’s being brought up and concerned about like today or at least like it was definitely like 3 years ago or 2017 but I I think It’s relevant because like obviously- [inaudible]

L: oh sorry you just cut out, sorry could you repeat that?

T: oh yeah sorry just like being like a women like it affects me um on that side of things as well, so I feel like yeah that yeah that’s why it would be relevant to me, um it’s much more relevant, just because like for example again like I’m not saying we shouldn’t learn about it but the First Nations stuff I really had not anything to do with and um like it didn’t affect me and I wasn’t affecting it or whatever, do you know what I mean, it wasn’t like it’s not a problem today, it’s something that happened in the past and like it’s been resolved, so I think it’s good to know about it so we don’t repeat our problems, but to go that much in to depth about something that wasn’t as important as going just again like in knowing about these problems that are happening now so we can be more aware, join campaigns if we’re interested in that, and like yeah again like [inaudible] knowing more about what’s happening in the world today rather than so much in the past what happened in the past because I think we won’t repeat our mistakes as long as we know a decent amount of the information but we could keep making mistakes or there could be more issues if we don’t like ca- and it could turn in to bigger issues if we don’t catch them earlier. Um so I think things like the Me Too movement like that like that’s great and I wish that that was brought up in school, yeah

L: mm ok. Um with the um learning about kind of indigenous um issues and kind of the history of Canada in school, did they also talk about though kind of relevance for today? Um or some of kind of the disparity between indigenous people and the rest of Canada today, or was it really just focusing on the history?

T: nooo it was- wait sorry what did you mean about to- you said something about today?

L: yeah like um just sort of there’s still kind of sort of the legacy of what um of colonialism in Canada I would say has still kind of carried on today-

T: right

L: but it sounds like maybe they didn’t really talk about that so much in school, it was more focused on historically?

T: yeah exactly, like we learnt we learnt about like all of the different like the exact dates of specific events from back before like even before my parents were born like all about like residential schools which aren’t even a thing now and we learnt all about um yeah, everything was pretty much all in the past like it wasn’t about- we like the only thing we learnt about to the present time was [pause] like how how if we just like if we just like the fact that if we know more about this then there’s less chance of us repeating our mistakes. That’s the only really thing that they really that they’d explain I guess that was their explanation of why they were teaching it too, um but yeah I like no like actual information on like current stuff. I know that there’s like residential- or indigenous people like in the schools that help like the First Nations children like in the schools like in high schools, so they would talk about stuff relevant to today but yeah I just remember watching so many movies and stuff about and books we had to read and stuff, mainly movies though, and there was like one like again I told you about the residential schools and the children getting beaten up. And another one was about like a certain like celebration dance and and stuff that they did and like the potluck that they had and stuff so yeah it was all about like the past stuff that they yeah so yeah it wasn’t really like how like what what their position is nowadays. Like for example like all of the First Nation land like {in region in BC} like I’d like to know more about how that works and stuff and like yeah I know that there is like First Nations territory and stuff like only First Nations can build on this or like I don’t know just like certain things like that but I don’t underst- like I just don’t know how that works exactly and so things like that even would be more interesting to learn about, um like yeah how it’s continuing and how like they resolved the problems and how they decided to continue on with that today

L: yeah I’m I’m surprised like I’ve read a little a bit about how kind of how they’ve re-done the curriculum a bit but I really thought that they were kind of with the aim of linking it to to what is happening today and just like as an example, you spoke about land, um there’s um sort of like um issues around land claims that haven’t been dealt with yet and they’re like in the judicial system, they’ve been there since like the 1990s um and so-

T: oh wow

L: so I think stuff like that should be included

T: yeah

L: yeah and in February I think it was there was in in the news um the like First Nations barricades on the the train tracks and stuff in Ontario, did you hear about that at all

T: no I didn’t

L: no ok anyways so I just think that it’s an ongoing thing of what happened in the past but that I think um students, it would be better if they were taught more about that stuff [laughter]

T: about that stuff exactly, yeah

L: yeah yeah um ok cool, I’m just going to um pull up my questions I know I have one left but I just want to see if there’s anything I’ve missed um just one sec

T: no problem

L: um so I guess to end, um, I’m just wondering um how so in terms, coming back to gender issues and stuff, I’m wondering, um do you think that gender equality has been achieved already or um if not how do you think it could be achieved

T: I think it has been achieved by the majority of the population. I know that there are maybe some men who don’t treat women equally and just like treat poorly so I’m not saying that it’s everybody, that it’s been resolved completely, but I think that we have done like everybody has done a good job of well obviously we’ve come a long way again from what it used to be like, um but I personally think like in my life I feel like it’s been resolved, but again I know that there is other people who would say differently because of personal experiences they’ve had, but um that’s like a very minor amount of people from what I know because just I say that just because I don’t know anybody that’s experienced that, I’ve just maybe heard of a few stories or something but I know that everybody in my life probably would feel that for the most part like yeah it’s not a huge, it’s not a huge issue, or at least not something that’s ever talked about as an issue or ever as an issue um just like within my group of friends and family again um yeah I yeah I I I I get like in saying that though, it is like relevant though even about how the past like how in the past women were treated because I feel like it’s good to know like that type of history is good to know because if I grew up in the generation that’s how I would have been treated too right whereas I feel like I can’t relate as much to the indigenous community um like I don’t know I feel like the history of feminism is more relevant to me and so that just would have been probably more interesting to learn about at least, um but yeah I I say that [pause] I couldn’t come up with a reason why in saying why it’s not resolved, like I haven’t had anything like jump out at me to make me think that it’s still an issue, um but again like it’s not something that is talked about a lot like at least like in school, never talked about so I wouldn’t really know if it was an issue or not in the rest of the world other than in my own life

L: mmm great, well thanks very much. I’m just wondering if before we end if there’s anything you want to come back to or add or anything at all

T: no I think that’s great

L: great, well thank you so much um it’s been really interesting speaking with you

Debrief & concluding remarks

Tamara is a pseudonym

Redactions indicated in {} to protect participant’s anonymity