

The Educational Potential of Cyberfeminisms: An Intersectional Analysis of @coletivoandorinha, @feministasemmovimento and @feministas.pt profiles

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Abstract: Focusing on the dialogue between cyberfeminisms and education, through an intersectional perspective, this study combines the work of feminist authors such as Haraway (1991), DeLaurentis (2004), hooks (2013), Crenshaw (1991), and Butler (2011) with others recent works to address the following question: How do cyberfeminist *Instagram* profiles contribute to intersectional education for gender equality? To answer that, we analysed the profiles @coletivoandorinha, @feministasemmovimento and @feministas.pt between 2021 and 2023, using a qualitative method (Minayo, 2015), with semi-structured interviews to: 1. understand the strategies of the cyberfeminist profiles; 2. identify gender and race differences in the construction of cyberfeminist discourses; 3. identify the main challenges in translating cyberfeminist content into school vocabulary. Results show may enable understanding of how intersectionality is verifiable in cyberfeminist discourses, and how contents may prove adequate for educational purposes.

Keywords: Cyberfeminism, Education, Feminist Pedagogies, Intersectionality, Instagram, Netnography

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of social media and the changes caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have transformed the ways we communicate and learn. The boom of feminist profiles in cyberspace, especially on *Instagram*, and the popularity of the fourth wave of feminism, highlight the concept of cyberfeminism (Miguel and Boix, 2013). This new manifestation of feminism expands the reach of feminist ideologies and collaborates with what some authors (Gago, 2020) call transnational feminism, where national borders are shortened and the internationalization of feminist agendas become more consistent, cooperative, and effective. Meanwhile, Intersectionality (Collins and Bilge, 2021) is also one of the main points of this fourth wave, which guides current activism towards historically neglected racial agendas. In addition, Instagram's feminist activism enables young people greater access to issues related to gender equality and can contribute to their education and engagement on these issues. Thus, authors such as da Silva and Palhano (2020) suggest that schools should appropriate the discussions on social media and bring them to the classrooms, and cyberfeminists' discussions should stimulate students' arguments, thus boosting critical thinking about gender stereotypes.

Cyberfeminism is one of the most important themes of fourth-wave feminism. This study combines the work of feminist authors such as Haraway (1991), DeLaurentis (2004), hooks (2013), Crenshaw (1991) and Butler (2011) with recent studies by Santos, Fernandes and York (2022) and Scolari (2016) to focus on the dialogue between cyberfeminisms and education, through an intersectional perspective, to address the following question: How do cyberfeminist *Instagram* profiles contribute to intersectional education for gender equality?

To answer this question, we used a qualitative perspective with semi-structured interviews (Minayo, 2015) to analyse, @coletivoandorinha, @feministasemmovimento and @feministas.pt profiles between the years 2021 and 2023. The main objectives were: 1. understanding the strategies of the selected cyberfeminist profiles; 2. identifying gender and race differences in the construction of cyberfeminist discourses; 3. identifying main challenges in translating cyberfeminist content into school vocabulary.

2. Cyberfeminisms and Gender Identity

The current fourth wave of feminism brings to the fore important themes such as technology and new forms of activism integrated with cyberspace. Although cyberfeminism term isn't a theoretical consensus (Paasonen, 2011) its main characteristics include horizontality, intersectionality, and feminist transnationalism (Cochrane, 2013; Crenshaw 1991; Gago, 2020).

The term cyberfeminism emerged in the 1990s and is associated with the philosopher Sadie Plant (1996), who connected women, machines, and technology in her works. Furthermore, launched by the Australian collective VNP Matrix, the term was used as a tribute to Donna Haraway's (1991) cyborg manifesto.

After the rapid growth of digital technologies and rise of social media, today cyberfeminism is most known as a networked feminist practice that aims, both politically and aesthetically, to build new orders and dismantle old myths in society by using technology (Lemos, 2009). In contrast, Lamartine (2021) points out that cyberspace is made up of several particularities and this multifaceted characteristic dialogues with feminism's diversity. Cyberfeminism is essentially considered an online activism. However, for Miguel and Boix (2013), cyberfeminism is part of a new field of analysis, which comes primarily from the relationship established between feminisms and technology.

The relationship between cyberfeminisms and the fourth wave of feminism is built through the internet, which enables the transnationalization of feminist agendas, and the call for awareness of intersectionality themes (Cochrane, 2013). The digital universe allows the cooperation between local and global feminist movements, and interaction between subjects who dialogue and exchange experiences through virtual spaces. Accordingly, the relationship between feminisms, technologies and the internet allows for more autonomous communication and offers new tools to expand feminist discourses (Gago, 2020).

Gender studies also play an important role in cyberfeminisms. Initially, Haraway (1991) explored the denaturalization of women's identity, making connections between technology and the feminist movement, and thus created the cyborg manifesto. Then, the innovative concept of "gender technology" by De Laurentis (2004) was later on disruptive in terms of social discourse, the adequacy of bodies and the domestic of desire. All of them imposed from a gender normativity. Later, Butler (2011) updated the debate with the idea of "becoming gendered" and the "performativity of gender", which allowed studying the proliferation of cultural configurations of sex and gender and coined the term *queer* on stage (Butler, 2011). For the author, it would only be possible to use the category of gender as something fluid, constructed, performed and systemic.

Butler (2011) adds that gender identity can be understood as a set of cultural meanings of imitative practices, that is, that throughout life the subject imitates a set of actions, gestures and acts that end up building the illusion of a primary gender self. In this way, Butler concludes that gender is reaffirmed in society through repetition, so we repeat gender through performance.

Allied to this idea, Queer Theory contributes to envision the socially constructed character of sexualities and the way in which modern science has resorted to categories, which were later transformed into identities, as a form of biopolitical administration (Cascais, 2004). The term *queer* challenges the identity structure, demarcated by gender binaries and heteronormativity as a form of political fiction (Butler, 2011). In this way, gender studies teach us that it is no longer possible to dissociate gender equality from the use of new technologies, because it is also there that new identities, relationships and interpretations of the self are established.

Therefore, Queer Theory is very important for this study because it collaborates with the expansion of the debate on sexualities, proposing the normalization of sexual diversities. In this sense, by understanding sexualities also as identity characteristics that construct subjects and that, within the heteronormative system, are repressed or discriminated against, we reinforce the importance of expanding this debate to all spheres of society, especially in schools where identities are being built. For this reason, our study will be located in these institutions.

3. Intersectionality and Critical Education

Intersectionality is a very important concept for today's feminisms, as it integrates a critical perspective on inequalities that are not hierarchical (Crenshaw, 1991). According to Collins and Bilge (2021), intersectionality goes beyond recognising the multiplicity of systems of oppression that operate from categories such as gender, class, race, and sexuality. It transposes the sum of dominations, enabling a transdisciplinary theory that captures the complexity of identities from an integrated approach (Collins and Bilge, 2021). Also, research and critical praxis are central points for using intersectionality as an analytical tool, which "can help empower communities and individuals" (Collins and Bilge, 2021, p. 57).

The embracing of intersectionality as a category of analysis allows feminist movements to take on campaigns to end discrimination against black women and against other minorities such as the LGBTQIA+ population in their agendas. The intersectional approach also serves here as a justice parameter, as Collins and Bilge (2021) suggest, the combination of investigation and critical praxis enables more effective actions to fight against inequalities and integrate marginalized groups in order to guarantee their rights.

From an educational perspective, intersectionality is an important foundation for the development of critical knowledge and the fight against inequalities. The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, developed by Paulo Freire (2019), proposes a teaching method that values individual and collective experiences to make them knowledge tools for

the construction of critical thinking. In this way, it is a method that dialogues directly with the emancipatory principles and goals of intersectional thinking.

Freire's theory (2019) is guided by the sense of social justice and proposed a dialogical method which is a form that would promote a critical analysis of the world, through the elaboration of complex questions, problem solving, and thus exercising critical thinking. In this way, critical education is beneficial for society, as it improves the collective understanding of intersectional social inequalities, broadens the types of critical thinking, and develops better resources for dealing with problematic situations.

Also, the dialogue between Freire's thought and feminist pedagogy is crucial to build new perspectives on fighting against inequalities. bell hooks (2013) said that dialogic pedagogy is one of the main roots of feminist pedagogies, and that it is the most effective way to get more critical people committed to diversity. Feminist pedagogies are a concept and method of applying feminist knowledge for pedagogical purposes, aiming to promote a transgressive and critical education (hooks, 2013). The work of feminist pedagogies is oriented towards eliminating prejudice and discrimination, working on the prior information to which groups excluded from power had access (Rosa, 2021).

Thus, both dialogic pedagogy, feminist pedagogies and intersectionality treat differences as an important part of human development and for a diverse society to become more sustainable, stimulating individual and collective critical thinking is fundamental. For this reason, Freire's pedagogy provides a material path for a better development of intersectionality. Collins and Bilge (2021), scholars of Freire's work, argue that "The use of intersectional frameworks to rethink social inequality requires a more participatory and democratic methodology, one that rejects the neoliberal tendency to evaluate knowledge since its 'use' or 'function' for the individual project" (Collins and Bilge, 2021, p. 244).

To connect the intersectional and pedagogical perspective with practice, we use transmedia literacy project (Scolari, 2016) to contribute to the debate. According to Scolari (2016), transmedia literacy "can be understood as a set of skills, practices, values, and learning strategies applied in the context of digital participatory cultures" (Scolari, 2016, p.272). The project, developed a new methodology that involved the creation of questionnaires, workshops and interviews with students in order to integrate traditional didactic methods with transmedia.

Scolari (2016) adds about the different resources to which, over time, literacy has adapted. Therefore, remember that from a traditional perspective, if the book was the main working resource, later, from a media literacy perspective, television was the central resource of analysis. Lastly, it states that in transmedia literacy it is digital networks and interactive media experiences that become the center of analysis.

Another concept that contributes with this study is critical multiliteracy (Santos, Fernandes, and York, 2022). This concept considers critical literacy approach to compose alternative curricula for schools and universities (Street, 2014). From this perspective, the multiplicity of experiences, social and cultural context, when interpreted and given meaning in people's life contexts, contribute to education as a dialogical, liberating, and emancipatory practice. The study maps different cyberfeminist content to understand how they can inspire feminist pedagogical practices in cyberculture. It also explored the connection between women's subjectivity and the potential for critical multiliteracy gathered by women in cyberculture (Santos, Fernandes, & York, 2022).

Therefore, transmedia literacy and critical multiliteracy help us connect cyberfeminist themes with those of education and intersectionality. These are concepts that enrich media literacy by categorizing new digital skills as a new informal learning strategy. Thus, it is possible to analyse cyberfeminist contents as informal teaching strategies that also apply to formal education.

4. Method

Aiming to 1. understanding the strategies of the selected cyberfeminist profiles; 2. identifying gender and race differences in the construction of cyberfeminist discourses; 3. identifying main challenges in translating cyberfeminist content into school vocabulary, and answer the research question of: how cyberfeminist Instagram profiles contribute to intersectional education for gender equality? This study used a qualitative perspective with semi-structured interviews (Minayo, 2015) to analyse, @coletivoandorinha, @feministasemmovimento and @feministas.pt profiles between the years 2021 and 2023.

Three interviews were carried out with a representative of each profile. The three were women between 20 and 40 years old and we chose to use just the profile names instead of each representative. The interviews lasted around 35 minutes and were made in an online format, as required by the interviewees. The interview guide

contained a total of 13 questions subdivided into three areas: 1) Organization; 2) Communication; 3) Cyberfeminisms.

As Instagram is currently one of the most used social media by young people (Marktest, 2022), it was decided to use it as a research tool. The selection process involved the visibility and engagement criteria on Portuguese feminist Instagram profiles. As a Brazilian PhD student, it was interesting to include a profile with a Global South feminist perspective to improve the content in terms of an intersectional, standpoint view (Collins, 1986) and place of speech (Ribeiro, 2019). The most suitable profiles for analysis therefore were @asfeministas.pt, (The Feminists.pt), @feministasemmovimento (Feminists on the Move), and the Brazilian based in Portugal @coletivoandorinha (Andorinha Collective).

The AsFeministas.pt is a feminist communication platform for the fight against patriarchy, capitalism, and all forms of oppression. They identify themselves as socialist feminist and aims to contribute to a broad, plural, and transformative feminist movement. The content communicated by the platform claims for the rights of women, black women and the LGBTQIA+ community.

The Feminist on the Move profile is an NGO that fights against discrimination, through an intersectional and inclusive feminism perspective. They believe that it is possible to have an active, inclusive, democratic feminism that is attentive to the violence suffered by women and girls. They pursue eliminating multiple gender discriminations, ensuring the materialization of gender equality, in an intersectional and transgenerational way.

The Andorinha Collective is organized mainly by Brazilian students, professors, and researchers from diverse areas. They seek to communicate and discuss issues related to the Brazilian political situation through an alternative narrative. They promote interdisciplinary discussions in the areas of politics, art, and education to build sustainable alternatives to rapid social changes in Brazil and around the world.

Considering the divergences between public and private spaces, the ethical issues behind working with the internet are difficult to define, but, according to Kozinets (2015), the main thing about ethics in using internet data is honesty between the researcher and the online community members. The same concern was raised with the interviews. The issue of participants' consent was addressed in order to clarify the purpose of the research, the procedures of data collection and how it would be used by the researcher.

5. Results

5.1 Strategies of Cyberfeminist Profiles

In terms of strategies the @asfeministas.pt develops courses and organize debates to cooperatively create new ideas to transform society. They also organize protests and manifestoes in partnership with platforms organizing the March to End Violence against Women, the 8M Marches and the LGBTQI+ Pride March in Lisbon.

The @feministasemmovimento is a formalized association, institutionalized by Portuguese law, but they state that "in practice the association is horizontal, we ensure equality among all members". They promote dialogue between scientific research on gender equality, the Portuguese government, and other social groups. Also contribute both through the request of parliamentary groups and through spontaneous actions of the association "since they are always attentive to the projects that are about to be approved or suggested for discussion in the Portuguese Parliament".

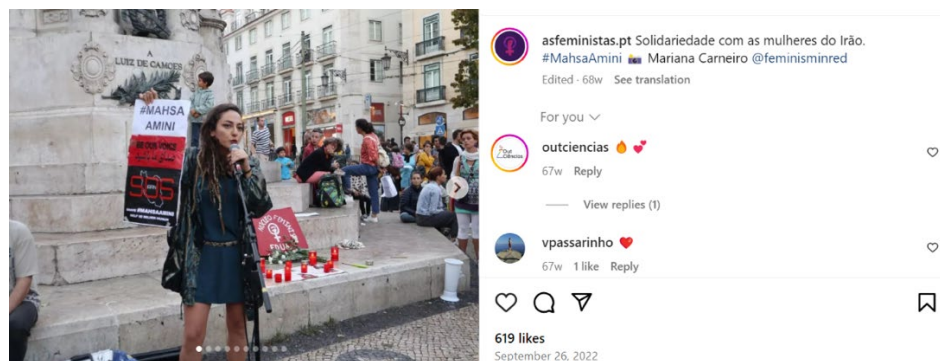


Figure 1: @asfeministas.pt

The @coletivoandorinha intend to be a safe and welcoming place for Brazilian immigrants, connect with other Brazilian collectives around the world and integrate Portuguese agenda in international and intersectional struggles. The collective articulates topics such as immigration, Brazilian and Portuguese politics to build an alternative communication path on complex issues that connect both countries.

Concerning the resources required to maintain an active Instagram profile, all three profiles rely on the volunteer work. That is why @feministasemmovimento says, “we don't always achieve consistency on social media, as we don't always have volunteers available to carry out this job”.

Regarding the communication with the community, the @feministasemmovimento adds that most of the time it happens through social media, while @coletivoandorinha and @asfeministas.pt report that besides the mobilization on the streets, they also interact with other feminist collectives and associations, participating in public conferences, and organizing book club meetings.

5.2 Gender and Race: Identity Differences

Concerning cyberfeminist identity, the @asfeministasemmovimento and @coletivoandorinha consider themselves as cyberfeminists, while @asfeministas.pt doesn't. The @feministasemmovimento believes that the @asfeministas.pt is more suitable for the cyberfeminist identity once they “develop more strategic content for social media”. Both @asfeministas.pt and @feministasemmovimento consider social media only as an activism tool in order to disseminating feminist actions.

In terms of gender and racial diversity the @feministasemmovimento states that they are organized only by women and intersectionality is their central perspective. They reported participation in a shelter project for victims of domestic violence in Lisbon as an example of how they are aware of overlapping differences and add, “most of the victims were migrants of different nationalities and cultural specificities”.

@feministasemmovimento also highlighted concern in producing texts and manifestoes where intersectionality is present, demonstrating integration with feminist agendas about racial and ethnic diversity, gender equality, age, sexuality, and others.



Figure 2 @feministasemmovimento

However, the @coletivoandorinha has a more diverse gender scenario, since its organization is created collectively by women and men. They also have a discourse committed to intersectionality and state that: “We believe that struggles become more powerful and must be thought of in a context and together. There is no point in considering yourself a feminist if you are not anti-racist or if it doesn't stop global warming. All the struggles resulting from the overexploitation of workers, in different forms and cruelties, perpetrated by the same capitalist system, structurally exploitative, racist, patriarchal”.

In contrast, @asfeministas.pt positioned itself in a more generic way, saying that the collective is created by women who fight against all types of oppression and, in its own words “we pay attention to the intersection of various struggles, and we keep in mind that freedom for all women covers all women”.

5.3 Challenges Between Cyberfeminist and School Vocabulary

In terms of cyberfeminist and education @feministasemmovimento engages in educational actions on gender equality and domestic violence prevention. While, @coletivoandorinha underscores the importance of progressive content on social media to counter conservatism “social media is a consolidated category in contemporary times and it is important to keep this place occupied by interesting, transformative, and progressive content, otherwise conservatism will prevail”. The @asfeministas.pt believes “the content we develop, as well as the initiatives and activities of discussion, book club, debate on feminist issues and training in the feminisms field, contribute to the education of young people”.



Figure 3: @coletivoandorinha

Also, the @feministasemmovimento contributes to education through informative publications, campaigns, and school actions. @coletivoandorinha sees social media as a vital platform for transformative content and mentions an independent association, "Diaspora," focusing on youth and education and @asfeministas.pt emphasizes discussions, book clubs, debates, and training as educational contributions.

When asked about accessibility of cyberfeminist content the @feministasemmovimento identifies the need for improvements, such as creating school-specific content adapted to digital platforms. @coletivoandorinha says there is a lack of time and resources for a specific educational project. However, @asfeministas.pt believe that the diversity of the collective, made up of “women of various ages and academic degrees” contributes to developing more accessible cyberfeminist content for young students.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

Cyberfeminism is one of the most important themes of the fourth wave and as a social movement, it has a political proposal that challenges the traditional social structure against gender inequality. The analyzed profiles demonstrated a great ability to communicate their political views, illustrating their perspective through various media.

Regarding profile strategies, we noticed a very organized discourse about feminist movements, pointing out their main political affinities with current feminisms. The profiles showed connection with the fourth wave agenda, especially intersectionality, but each one maintaining their perspective, collaborating to a diverse digital environment, and communicating to different audiences as well.

The profile @Asfeministas.pt is a young group active in street protests, connected to world issues. It is a collective that mobilizes protests on and off the social media, making transnational feminism happen. Their posts advocating violence against women in Iran (2022) are a great example of the borderless dialogue between feminisms such an important topic on the fourth wave agenda.

The @feministasemmovimento also demonstrates its political vision through posts, online campaigns such as “Não é Não” and some outdoor activities like the participation in the 8M march in 2023. However, they state that their main communication and mobilization strategy is through social media.

Also, @asfeministas.pt and @feministasemmovimento believe that social media are just a tool to publicize feminist actions. Expressing this, the profiles highlight two problems: 1. The current difficulty in defining cyberfeminism, especially after the popularization of the fourth wave, and 2. Hierarchies between activisms, which reinforce a conservative perspective on forms of protest and suggests a scale of importance among types of feminism.

The @coletivoandorinha showed a very critical position, especially the posts analyzed during the pandemic period (2021-2022) while Brazil was under the Bolsonaro government and didn't have a safe health policy. Thus, the majority of posts analyzed at that time condemned the president's negligent treatment to international bodies. This case exposes how cyberfeminism is an ally in fighting gender inequalities and political injustices, especially in the pandemic where work overload fell mainly on women and black women.

Concerning content production and communication with the community, all work is done by volunteers. As they reported during the interview, many ideas, or different projects that they would like to develop aren't always possible, because it depends on the volunteers, who are not always available, after all they have their own jobs and families. Thus, the layers of cyberfeminist action are so diverse that they compromise alternatives for expanding and operating the project. From an intersectional perspective, these layers are readapted in a more inclusive way, which tries to understand all the differences between women volunteers and direct them towards more subversive action, as suggested by Collins and Bilge (2021).

Regarding gender and racial differences, most of the profiles are produced only by women, other than @coletivoandorinha, which claims to have important collaborations with men as well. The element of gender diversity in the construction of profile content is interesting because it helps to include masculinity themes in cyberfeminist discussion. In dialogue with bell hooks (2013), in a society organized by patriarchy, violence also drastically affects men, therefore one of the fundamental sources of power to change it is to educate boys and men from a feminist perspective (hooks, 2004; 2013). Therefore, including men and people of other genders in the construction of cyberfeminist content is one of the ways to increase the discussion about masculinities and help everyone fight inequality.

Another important discussion is including intersectionality in cyberfeminist content. The profiles analysed are committed to this, some more attentive of having an intersectional approach in practice, especially when they have projects to care for women in vulnerable situations, as is the case with the profile @feministasemmovimento. However, @coletivoandorinha has a more assertive position on intersectionality, with an anti-racist speech and an appeal to global warming. This may be because they are a Brazilian based in Portugal profile, and the racial discussion in Brazil is very advanced, including the environmental one.

These ideas are related to fourth wave feminism, and cyberfeminism appears to be an important source to spread the news and connect worldwide activists, students, politicians, entrepreneur, and governments to pay attention and take actions to social inequality's issues. Also, cyberfeminisms have an interesting role in terms of intersectional education. The dialogue between social media and feminism praises the intersectional perspective that denies the separation and hierarchization of social differences, allowing a more horizontal look at identities (Collins & Bilge, 2021). Thus, a more equitable way of dealing with differences, such as gender, race, age, sexuality.

Considering how cyberfeminism contributes to intersectional education on gender studies, we highlight that intersectionality is considered both a knowledge project and a political weapon capable of challenging inequalities (Collins and Bilge, 2021). Therefore, combining intersectionality, cyberfeminism and critical education (Freire, 2019) can be an interesting possibility to challenge and fight against gender inequalities.

After data analysis, we realized that all profiles believe that cyberfeminism can help in education for gender equality, but the profile @coletivoandorinha admits that it doesn't have enough resources to invest in a specific educational project. While @asfeministas.pt never thought about the educational potential of cyberfeminism, but believes that the content it develops, as well as discussion activities, book clubs and debates, contribute to the education of young people on the gender equality issue.

The @feministasemmovimento was the only one to present material actions in collaboration with some schools in Lisbon where they develop informative presentations on the prevention of domestic violence and gender equality. This is a good example of how cyberfeminism can integrate intersectional education in the field and make cyberculture dialogue more inclusive in the school curriculum.

Since the emergence of feminist waves and the popularization of themes on gender equality, feminist pedagogies began to be included in the formal curriculum, and the school began to have a formative dimension from the perspective of feminist epistemologies (Rosa, 2021). But in practice, the applicability of feminist pedagogy is reduced to specific criteria of each educational institution. Due to bureaucratic issues and the inadequate training of education professionals, the curricula end up dissolving into rare extracurricular activities throughout the school year (Rosa, 2021).

These curricular issues are aggravated when the traditional teaching format cannot keep up with the rapid technological transformation with the appearance of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and social media (Castells, 2014). This is why studies such as critical multiliteracy (Santos, Fernandes, & York, 2022) and transmedia literacy (Scolari, 2016) help to suggest alternative curricula that include technologies, feminist pedagogies and cyberfeminism. The inclusion of new technologies, like cyberfeminism, isn't an easy task and concerning the emergency of conservative forces in the world, especially regarding gender equality, it has become more difficult. But it is an essential step in combating inequalities for a more sustainable world.

We also analysed how cyberfeminism content can be more accessible to young students and the @feministasemmovimento believes that improvements are still needed, such as the creation of specific content for school vocabulary, adapted to the format of each digital platform. They said that they are starting to implement changes focused on education, but it is still early, mainly because they depend on voluntary work, which complicates the situation. Similar problem with the @coletivoandorinha, which doesn't have enough financial resources to dedicate a specific part of the collective's work from an educational perspective.

Therefore, the dialogue between cyberfeminism, intersectionality and education are very productive because it combines practical and theoretical ways of approaching difference. They stimulate critical thinking through people's multiple experiences and value subjectivities to fight against inequalities. They are powerful allies in the process of social transformation, as they can provide theoretical and practical support for political bodies committed to social justice and gender equality.

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