

Course title and number: Feminist Methodologies
WS 301 3 Credits

Course Description:

Explores the implications of feminist theorizing across disciplinary and cultural contexts for both methodology (theories about the research process) and epistemology (theories of knowledge). Examines how knowledge and power intersect, how genre or form impacts knowledge, how the knower is implicated in the knowledge produced, and how social location shapes inquiry. It considers implications of intersectional approaches to re/presenting knowledge and identity.

Course Prerequisites: WS 150 or WS 110 or AACCS 150

Course Objectives:

1. To explore and discuss various definitions of “feminist methods” and “feminist epistemologies”.
2. To examine how widely-accepted assumptions about knowledge impact our understandings of what knowledge is and who can be considered a knower.
3. To critically consider how the knower/researcher *impacts and shapes* rather than simply “discovers” or “observes” the known.
4. To investigate and question how knowledge and power intersect.
5. To introduce alternative definitions and locations of “knowledge” and “methodology”.
6. To explore the impact of form/language/image upon the knowledge produced.
7. To acquaint students with critical thinking, reading, and writing through required written and oral assignments as well as through cooperative work in small groups.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

1. articulate why feminists have sought to re-define the parameters of knowledge and who can be considered a knower;
2. describe and summarize in writing some key methodological debates about traditional definitions of knowledge and conventional assumptions about good research;
3. demonstrate, orally and in writing, critical, reflexive approaches to research;
4. describe in writing and orally some of the debates and critiques within the field of Women’s Studies about the definitions and understandings of “feminist methodologies”;
5. articulate methodological issues of power, perception, and difference;
6. critically discuss and write about the issues in this class in an essay and in research projects.

Topical Outline of the Course Content

- I. **Introduction:** Cartesian imprint on contemporary knowing, Aristotelian traditions, Positivism and conventional assumptions about knowledge. Feminist critiques of these approaches to knowing. Basic contemporary feminist theoretical frames for re-thinking these traditions: “both/and” epistemology [Patricia Hill Collins], “intersectionality” [Kimberle Crenshaw], and notions of the colonized imagination/discursive colonization [Franz Fanon, Chandra Talpade Mohanty].

- II. The Politics of Representation and Knowledge Production** Introduce notions of knowledge and politics as always intersecting, impact of power and privilege upon knowledge produced. Explore the “screens,” “lenses,” or “controlling images” that impact our perception of self and other: discuss observation as located [standpoint] rather than universal.
- III. Ethics of Knowing** Introduce key questions in ethics of knowing: can ‘liberatory’ research also be coercive—in what ways/contexts? Explore questions of objectification in research as well as explanatory devices used in analysis [such as analogy, metaphor] and their possible problems.
- IV. Defining and Debating Feminist Methodologies** How have feminist methodologies been defined—what are their characteristics? Is there one kind of ‘feminist method’? Explore various working definitions of feminist research practices and theories of knowledge. Articulate how many feminist methodologies have been critiqued, particularly by women of color and “Third World” women. Develop more nuanced sense of debates about knowledge in the field of Women’s Studies.

Teaching Methods and Student Learning Activities:

This seminar will focus on open, intellectual inquiry and rigorous reflection. The course centers on the premise that starting from the intersections of race, class, sexuality, and gender is important for understanding the politics of knowing and the issues surrounding questions of good research practices. In addition, for intellectual variety and to support a range of learning styles, this course combines a range of:

- **teaching methods** (brief lectures, small and large group discussions),
- **course materials** (philosophical essays, fictional and first-person narratives, visual media and film, theoretical analyses, statistical research), and
- **student learning activities** (essays, freewriting, discussion groups, individual and group work, and external research projects).

Student Assessment: student learning outcomes will be assessed via the following:

- External research projects [during the semester and/or at the close of the semester] in which the student draws connections between course topics and discussions and her/his research process [context of discovery] and research findings/analysis [context of justification].
- In-class presentation of research findings: demonstrate ability to summarize and reflect upon research methods and methodologies used and implications of their findings.
- Participation in weekly class discussions of the reading materials and in evaluating peer research projects
- Collaborative work/small-group activities

Suggested Readings and Texts:

1. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 2nd Edition, Patricia Hill Collins
2. Fruits of Sorrow: Framing Our Attention to Suffering, Elizabeth V. Spelman
3. Women, Knowledge and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy, 2nd Edition, Ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall

Additional Bibliography:

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- 1990a, 'En Rapport, In Opposition: Cobrando cuentas a las nuestras', in *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, aunt lute, San Francisco.
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Original Departmental Approval Date

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12. Departmental Revision Approval Date: December 2004