

Feminist Knowledge Production (988:603)
Department of Women's and Gender Studies
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Monday, 3:55 – 6:55
Ruth Dill Johnson Crockett Room 011, Douglass Campus
Spring 2019

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Course Overview:

This course introduces students to the epistemologies and methods researchers use to create new knowledge. Designed as a working seminar, we begin with a focus on how knowledge is produced, organized and circulated. In other words, we start with an emphasis on epistemology and consider how fields of study are defined, organized, contested, and obscured. Here we pay particular attention to gender studies and to critical race and sexuality studies as well as to social justice as areas of inquiry. The seminar analyzes the suitability of various modes of knowledge production, and encourages students to recognize the advantages of relying on multiple epistemologies and methodologies for any proposed research project. We emphasize the epistemological assumptions that inform particular methodologies, and consider the standards of evidence and the criteria for argument on which they depend.

Studying research methodologies, we read exemplary research articles in gender studies broadly defined and engage in scholarship in queer studies, critical race and ethnic studies, and social justice, and unpack how the authors did their work. What kinds of questions do scholars and scholar-activists grapple with before they embark on a project? How do they know when they have defined a project that is manageable in scope yet also one that supports their research goals? How do researchers deal with problems that arise when they are immersed in their projects? What tools or methods do the researchers use to collect evidence, analyze their findings, argue, and support their claims? How do they figure out how best to report their findings to various audiences? In other words, research methods constitute the “how” of knowledge production.

The last section of the class enables students to design their own research project on the topic of their choice. Ideally the resulting research proposal could be the basis of a project you might want to carry out as an independent study, honors thesis, internship, and/or in a social movement organization or in a job. Ultimately this course will facilitate a stronger understanding of various forms of feminist thought, how it starts, develops and reaches a finished form. You will become a more active participant in the creation of feminist knowledge rather than remain a passive consumer.

Learning Goals:

This class has several interrelated objectives:

1. Students will be able to define the characteristics commonly associated with feminist knowledge production. Students will be able to assess if and how feminist knowledge is distinct from other forms and processes of knowledge production.
2. Students will learn how to design a feasible research project. Feasibility here requires that research questions are linked to gaps or discrepancies in scholarly literatures and are amenable to clearly articulated research methods.
3. Students will become familiar with and develop basic competencies in the multiple methodologies for collecting evidence. These competencies include but are not limited to narrative analysis, interviewing, field research, unobtrusive observation, archival research, survey research among others.
4. Students will learn various strategies for analyzing evidence and research findings. These competencies include but are not limited to how to interpret archival evidence; present and read tables, charts and graphs; how to interpret written texts; how to analyze interviews and testimonies, among others.
5. Students will learn the advantages of using multiple epistemologies and multiple methods to respond to a research question.
6. Students will learn how to achieve an effective balance between making claims and arguments on the one hand, and providing supporting evidence on the other.

Codes of Conduct:

This class strives to create and sustain an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, (dis)ability, region/country of origin, and political orientation. Students must conduct themselves with complete respect for all class members and for the learning process. We will not tolerate any deliberate or unthinking violations of these principles, and will actively seek ways to correct and resolve all such infractions. Any and all violations of the rules of civil conduct including disregard for others, disengagement and disruption including the unauthorized use of electronic devices will risk having significant grade penalties and formal complaints filed with the university.

All students with special needs will be accommodated. Students are encouraged to speak with the instructor early during the term. To make appropriate arrangements, please contact the Office of Disability Services in Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus or you may access their office at <http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu>.

All work for this course must adhere to the specific practices and ethos of the University's policy on academic integrity, which should be read at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>. Full compliance with the academic integrity policy is mandatory. Failure to adhere to the specific rules and regulations as well as the overall intent of the policy will at a minimum result in a failing grade.

Students are expected to attend all classes. You must use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for any absence. Students with more than one unexcused absences will have their final grade lowered by 2 percent for each additional class missed.

Course Requirements:

This is a working seminar and is a collective endeavor. Everyone must come to each class fully prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Participation in all seminar discussions means active and constructive engagement with the texts. This includes being able to summarize a text's major arguments, assess its strengths and weaknesses, and communicate your knowledge in ways that acknowledge and build upon your classmates' contributions.

Every student will facilitate or co-facilitate one seminar meeting. Facilitation means that you (and your co-facilitator) should read the assigned text(s) by Sunday noon, the day prior to the class meeting and post a reading report that analyzes the text(s) assigned. In addition, facilitators are responsible for introducing the readings to the class when we meet. This brief presentation—about 10 minutes in length should provide an overview of the readings assigned that day and raise topics and questions for class discussion.

Most of the readings for our class are available on Sakai <https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal>. In addition, there is one required book for our class: Safiya Umoja Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York University Press, 2018), available for purchase at the Rutgers Barnes and Noble Bookstore in New Brunswick.

Writing Assignments

Knowledge production is both a collective and also a deeply individual enterprise. Over the course of the semester, each student must complete a research proposal that engages each of the following challenges:

- discerning the relevant literature;
- devising coherent strategies of critique;
- identifying innovative theoretical frameworks;
- envisioning a sophisticated research methodology;
- grappling with the construction and assessment of evidence;
- developing a feasible research project and timetable for completion.

Assignment #1

The first writing assignment should take up the first three challenges—identifying the literature(s) relevant to the research project, drafting a literature review that provides cogent and constructive critiques of the relevant literature, and analyzes the theoretical frameworks that might be brought to bear on the project in order to break new ground. By criticizing the omissions, distortions, and lapses of existing work, the first assignment should create a space for your innovative research project.

A good literature review does not summarize everything that other authors say about a topic. Rather, it crafts an argument by building on selective explication and analysis of other authors' views of the issue, developing a comparative assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of varying accounts by interrogating their assumptions, examining their methodologies, and evaluating the comparative merits of alternate approaches. The central objective of the literature review is to structure a coherent research question by engaging with the current state of the field. The deadline for the first assignment is March 4.

Assignment #2

The second assignment builds upon the first, moving from identification of a research question to the design of an innovative methodologies that can produce new knowledge. As we will be discussing in class, different methodologies construe the object of inquiry differently. In this assignment, students should consider how various methodologies might constitute the research topic at the heart of their projects. By comparing diverging epistemological assumptions, problem identifications, standards of evidence, models of explanation, analytic categories, techniques and investigative methods, data collection, analysis of results, narrative strategies, and discursive styles, students should begin to hone in on the appropriate research strategies for their project. In articulating the use of multiple methods and developing comparisons between them, the students should tailor their particular research design to the phenomenon to be studied, explaining the advantages (and disadvantages) afforded by the methodological approaches chosen. The deadline for the second writing assignment on comparative methodology is March 25.

The final proposal is due on May 6.

Grading Policy:

In calculating grades for the course, student performance will be assessed according to the following weighting scheme:

Informed seminar participation and regular attendance	25%
Facilitation of seminar meeting	10%
Writing Assignment #1	20%
Writing Assignment #2	20%
Final research proposal	25%

Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

January 28 Course Introduction and Overview

February 4 Hallmarks and Benchmarks of Feminist Inquiry

Is feminist research distinct from other areas of inquiry? Is gender research the same as feminist research? How would we describe those differences? Is interdisciplinary scholarship research distinct from disciplinary research? Does interdisciplinarity demand multiple methods? Is feminist research identifiable through its methods of study?

Buker, Eloise. 2003. "Is Women's Studies a Disciplinary or an Interdisciplinary Field of Inquiry?" *NWSA Journal* 15:73-93.

Gilley, Jennifer. 2007. "Women's Studies Information-Seeking: A State of the Union Address." *NWSA Journal* 19:220-29.

Bell, Erica Townsend. 2012. "Writing the Way to Feminism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38(1):127-152.

February 11 Questions of Objectivity, Truth and Knowledge Production

How are knowledge claims authenticated and validated? Is objectivity possible and/or desirable? Consider library and bookstores as sites for the important ways they shape, represent, and present knowledge.

Wiegman, Robin. 2002. "Academic Feminism Against Itself." *NWSA Journal* 14:18 – 37.

Olson, Hope A. 2001. "The Power to Name: Representation in Library Catalogs." *Signs* 26:639-68.

Hogan, Kristen. 2008. "Women's Studies in Feminist Bookstores: 'All the Women's Studies Women Would Come In'." *Signs* 33:595-621.

Adler, Melissa. 2017. "Labeling Obscenity: The Delta Collection." Chapter 2, pp. 63-91 in Melissa Adler, *Cruising the Library: Perversities in the Organization of Knowledge*. New York: Fordham University Press.

February 18 Conceptualizing Research and Defining Constructs

How do the authors understand the connections between their locations and their search for knowledge and claims for authoritative, authentic knowledges? Are "authoritative" and "authentic" effective criteria for knowledge claims? What are the authors' recommendations for designing a research project? What strategies enable us to avoid reproducing national, regional, gender, racial, ethnic, and class-based biases in our work?

February 18 Conceptualizing Research and Defining Constructs, continued

Harding, Sandra. 1991. "Strong Objectivity; and Socially Situated Knowledge." Pp. 138 – 163 in *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Fonow, Mary Margaret and Judith A. Cook. 2005. "Feminist Methodology: New Applications in the Academy and Public Policy." *Signs* 30: 2211-236.

Hamdy, Sherine. 2016. "How Publics Shape Ethnographers: Translating Across Divided Audiences." Pp. 287 – 309 in Didier Fassin, ed. *If Truth Be Told: The Politics of Public Ethnography*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Schuller, Kyla. 2018. "Introduction: Sentimental Biopower." Pp. 1 – 34 in *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century*. Durham: Duke University Press. Available online Rutgers Libraries Ebscohost Ebooks.

February 25 How the Internet Shapes Knowledge

We have considered the ways in which academic disciplines and interdisciplinary fields of study organize our knowledge. We have also considered how social movements, libraries and bookstores organize, represent and circulate knowledge. This week we turn our attention to the internet, digital technologies, search engines and algorithms.

Noble, Safiya Umoja. 2018. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: New York University Press.

Daniels, Jessie and Polly Thistlethwaite. 2016. *Being a Scholar in the Digital Era*. Bristol, UK and Chicago: Policy Press. (optional)

March 4 Research Design: Remaining an Ethical Person, Becoming an Effective Researcher
Assignment # 1 is due today.

This week we consider some of the challenges that affect research activist projects.

Halse, Christine and Anne Honey. 2005. "Unraveling Ethics: Illuminating the Moral Dilemmas of Research Ethics." *Signs* 30:2141-162.

Lee, Jennifer. 2002. "Appendix: Notes on Methodology and Tales from the Field." Pp. 199 – 232 in *Civility in the City: Blacks, Jews and Koreans in Urban America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

March 4 Research Design, continued

Moore, Mignon R. 2018. "Challenges, Triumphs, and Praxis: Collecting Qualitative Data on Less Visible and Marginalized Populations." Pp. 169-84 in D'Lane Compton, Tey Meadow and Kristen Schilt, eds. *Other, Please Specify: Queer Methods in Sociology*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Cho, Sumi, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Leslie McCall. 2013. "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis." *Signs* 38:785-810.

Fadlalla, Amal Hassan. 2011. "State Vulnerability and Humanitarian Visibility: Lubna's Pants and the Sudanese Trans-politics of Rights and Dissent." *Signs* 37:159-84.

O'Reilly, Kathleen. 2006. "Women Fieldworkers and the Politics of Participation." *Signs* 31:1075-98. (optional)

March 11 Individual Project Meetings

March 25 Archival Methods
Assignment # 2 is due today.

Archives represent how knowledge is collected, organized, reproduced and overlooked. What is an archive and how are decisions made about which materials to include? How do formal and informal archival practices shape knowledge production? How do we cope with *missing* archival evidence?

Strobel, Margaret. 1999. "Getting to the Source: Becoming a Historian, Being an Activist, and Thinking Archivaly: Documents and Memory as Sources." *Journal of Women's History* 11: 181-92.

Fuentes, Marisa J. 2016. "Introduction" and "Epilogue." Pp. 1 -12 and 144 – 48 in Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Auslander, Leora and Tara Zahra. 2018. "Introduction: The Things They Carried: War, Mobility and Material Culture." Pp. 1 – 22 in Leora Auslander and Tara Zahra, eds. *Objects of War: The Material Culture of Displacement*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Manalansan IV, Martin F. 2014. "The 'Stuff' of Archives: Mess, Migration and Queer Lives." *Radical History Review* 120:94 – 107.

Stone, Amy L. 2018. "Queer Persistence in the Archive." Pp. 216 – 29 in D'Lane Compton, Tey Meadow and Kristen Schilt, eds. *Other, Please Specify: Queer Methods in Sociology*. Oakland: University of California Press

April 1 Asking Questions: Oral History Interviews, Testimonies and Surveys

What criteria define good interview questions and good interview schedules? How do we analyze interviews? How do the contexts of interviews matter?

Yung, Judy. 2004. "A Bowlful of Tears' Revisited: The Full Story of Lee Puey You's Immigration Experience at Angel Island." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 25:1-22.

Geiger, Susan. 2004. "What's So Feminist about Women's Oral History?" Pp. 399-434 in Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Michelle L. Yaiser, eds. *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research*. New York. Oxford University Press.

Pollin-Galay, Hannah. 2018. "Introduction" and "Bad Testimony: Making and Breaking the Rules of Witnessing." Pp. 1 – 13 and 14 – 64 in Hannah Pollin-Galay. *Ecologies of Witnessing: Language, Place, and Holocaust Testimony*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Baumle, Amanda K. "The Demography of Sexuality: Queering Demographic Methods." Pp. 277 – 90 in D'Lane Compton, Tey Meadow and Kristen Schilt, eds. *Other, Please Specify: Queer Methods in Sociology*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Matsumoto, Valerie. 1996. "Reflections on Oral History: Research in a Japanese American Community." Pp. 160 – 69 in Diane L. Wolf, ed. *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. (optional)

Montell, Frances. 1999. "Focus Group Interviews: A New Feminist Method." *NWSA Journal* 11:44-71. (optional)

April 8 Ethnographic Research and Field Methods

What is ethnography and are feminist ethnographies different than other good ethnographies?

Meadow, Tey. 2018. "The Mess." Pp. 154-66 in D'Lane Compton, Tey Meadow and Kristen Schilt, eds. *Other, Please Specify: Queer Methods in Sociology*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Bessire, Lucas. 2018. "Tactical versus Critical: Indigenizing Public Ethnography." Pp. 138 – 59 in D'Lane Compton, Tey Meadow and Kristen Schilt, eds. *Other, Please Specify: Queer Methods in Sociology*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Williams, Patricia. 1996. "Skinfolk, Not Kinfolk: Comparative Reflections on the Identity of Participant-Observation in Two Field Situations." Pp. 72 -90 in Diane L. Wolf, ed. *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. (optional)

April 8 Ethnographic Research and Field Methods, continued

Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes. Chapter 1 “Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research.” Chapter 7 “Writing Ethnography”; Chapter 8 “Conclusion” (optional).

April 15 Narrative Analysis

How do we read and interpret texts and objects of inquiry? Is narrative analysis and reading intrinsic to all methods?

Hernandez, Jillian. 2009. “‘Miss, You Look Like a Bratz Doll’: On Chonga Girls and Sexual-Aesthetic Excess.” *NWSA Journal* 21:63-90.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1992. “The Politics of Translation.” Pp. 177-200 in Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips, eds., *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Best, Stephen and Sharon Marcus. 2009. “Surface Reading: An Introduction.” *Representations* 108: 1-21.

Nealon, Christopher. 2009. “Reading on the Left,” *Representations* 108: 22-50.

Price, Leah. 2009. “From *The History of a Book* to a ‘History of the Book,’” *Representations* 108: 120-138.

Cohen, Margaret. 2009. “Narratology in the Archive of Literature,” *Representations* 108: 51-75. (particularly pp. 51-62)

Crane, Mary Thomas. 2009. “Surface, Depth, and the Spatial Imaginary: A Cognitive Reading of the Political Unconscious.” *Representations* 108: 76-97.

April 22 Measurement Issues and Numerical Literacy

Presentations of Research Proposals, Part 1

This week introduces statistical measurement and asks how to use quantitative evidence.

Danner, Mona, Lucía Fort, and Gay Young. 1999. “International Data on Women and Gender: Resources, Issues, Critical Use.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 22:249-59.

April 22 Measurement Issues and Numerical Literacy, continued

Bowleg, Lisa. 2008. "When Black + Lesbian + Woman \neq Black Lesbian Woman: The Methodological Challenges of Qualitative and Quantitative Intersectionality Research." *Sex Roles* 59:319-25.

Miller, Jane. 2013. *The Chicago Guide to Writing about Numbers*. 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

April 29 Research Strategies Reconsidered: Theories, Methods, and Knowledge
Presentations of Research Proposals, Part 2

May 6 Conclusions and Review
Research Proposals Due Today