

Gender and Women's Studies: Critical Terrain

Second Edition

Margaret Hobbs and Carla Rice

TEACHER'S GUIDE



**WOMEN'S
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Teacher's Guide**

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PREAMBLE

The Teacher's Guide follows the order set out in the table of contents of the textbook. Each topic is introduced with learning suggestions under these headings:

- **Learning/Unlearning:** Provides questions to promote students' understanding of the material and self-reflection and to guide classroom conversations in ways that are open to difference and promote compassionate but critical dialogues.
- **Envisioning Change:** Provides questions and in-class activity suggestions to encourage students to apply what they have learned and unlearned. Through reflection and action items, we hope to inspire students about the possibilities for contributing to feminist change, individually and collectively, in their own lives and the broader social world.
- **Additional Resources:** Includes recommended additional resources for students and instructors, including news articles, activist websites, online blogs, videos, and films. Instructors might find these useful as they plan for their classes. The additional resources do not generally include references for further academic/scholarly articles and books; rather, the focus is on more popular and accessible written and visual material. Note that there are many sites where ideas for film resources are available, including *Films for the Feminist Classroom*, "an online, open-access journal [that] publishes film reviews that provide a critical assessment of the value of films as pedagogical tools in the feminist classroom" (see http://ffc.twu.edu/ffc_home.html).

Instructors are encouraged to take what they need from the Guide and use the resources in ways that fit with their own orientations to teaching and learning, making changes accordingly. In writing this Guide, our intention is not to prescribe a fixed way of entering into the material. We recognize that each instructor will create their own roadmap through the "critical terrain" of gender and women's studies.

INTRODUCTION

In the first or introductory class, instructors may wish to have students explore what brought them into the classroom. The following questions and resources might help to get students thinking about their preconceived ideas about what feminism is, whether and how they relate to the ideas and practices of feminism, and how their other spaces of social belonging impact their relationships to the array of feminisms that exist. Encouraging reflexive discussions early on helps to anchor students in their lived experiences and to foreground how “gender and women’s studies is not one thing” (p. 2).

Learning/Unlearning

The following questions may help students and instructors develop a scaffold for entering the material. Students might be encouraged to discuss the questions in class, perhaps in small groups, to begin developing skills in reflexivity about course material. Alternatively, students could be invited to write a journal entry/blog post in a reflective journal or blog they keep throughout the course, which could be submitted (in whole or part) for a course assignment.

Initial questions for consideration:

1. Why did I choose this course?
2. What are the four key trends in gender and women’s studies as outlined in the editors’ introduction?
3. What feelings does the word *feminism* bring up, for me? (No judgments; this is a chance to reflect on stereotypical and/or nuanced views of feminism.)
4. What do I hope to discover and take away from this course?

Envisioning Change

For an introductory class, instructors may wish to begin the process of getting students to reflect on their social positions in order to begin thinking in an intersectional way (prior to the formal introduction of intersectionality). This class might also involve mutually agreeing upon how to create “brave spaces” in the classroom to allow for multiple positionalities to coexist. Creating accessible and reflexive classrooms will look different depending on the size of the class, but the following exercises might be used to start the process of building dynamic classrooms:

1. Reflection questions: have students brainstorm in small groups about the following questions:
 - What are some stereotypes about feminism? Where have you encountered these stereotypes?
 - What are some more nuanced or positive representations of feminism in popular culture?

2. A map of what brought you to class today: have students draw a roadmap of their journey to class.
 - This might include a broader metaphorical “map” of their lives, going back to early experiences that made them want to learn about gender and women’s studies or that led them to college or university.
 - It might also include a micro-level map, which can help to identify barriers and facilitators to their presence in the classroom today.

3. Setting up brave spaces: <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/oacs/wp-content/uploads/sites/140/From-Safe-Spaces-to-Brave-Spaces.pdf>.
 - Instructors may wish to discuss the following proposed “rules” of brave spaces from Brian Arao & Kristi Clemens, “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice,” in Lisa Landreman, ed. *The Art of Effective Facilitation* (Stylus Publishing, Virginia: 2013):
 - controversy with civility (wherein “different views are expected and honored with a group commitment to understand the sources of disagreement and to work cooperatively toward common solutions” [p. 144])
 - own your intentions and your impact (recognizing that both actions and intentions are important, that actions are “not always congruent with our intentions, and that positive or neutral intentions do not trump negative impact” [p. 146])
 - be attentive to how one’s group identity impacts the decision to challenge themselves (recognize all the factors that might influence someone to challenge themselves around a given equity issue);
 - develop clarity around what “respect” looks like in the classroom context (unpacking how people might have different understandings about what constitutes respectful dialogue)
 - clarify conversation (about “the differences between a personal attack on an individual and a challenge to an individual’s idea or belief or statement that simply makes an individual feel uncomfortable” [p. 148]).
 - Instructors could also generate a list of access needs that students have in class, by inviting students to respond to some questions in written format or by inviting students to speak to them independently. Some guiding questions to have students consider are as follows:
 - What would make me more comfortable in the classroom?
 - What is a point of confusion or tension for me?
 - What aspects of my experience of the world impact my presence in the classroom?
 - What am I hoping to learn from this class?

Additional Resources

- Film resource: *Work*, Rachel Reichman (1996, 1 hour 30 min), and accompanying interview: <http://www.afterellen.com/movies/538871-work-intersectional-film-90s-almost-lost-time>.
- Film series: *Keep Calm and Decolonize* (2017), films responding to Buffy Sainte Marie's call to keep calm and decolonize: <http://www.cbc.ca/mediacentre/program/keep-calm-and-decolonize>.
 - The films are *Flood* by Amanda Strong, *Walking is Medicine* by Alanis Obomsawin, *Marco's Oriental Noodles* by Howie Shia, *Pink:Diss* by John Greyson, and *Brave Overseas* by Yung Chang; series is curated by Jesse Wentz.
- Film resource: *The F Word: Who Wants to be a Feminist?* CBC Doc Zone (2010, 45 min).
- Film resource: *I Was a Teenage Feminist: A Documentary about Redefining the F-Word* (2005, 62 min).
- Film resource: *Status Quo: The Unfinished Business of Feminism in Canada* (NFB 2012, 78 min). Divided into several parts focusing on specific issues.

Sample
(for review purposes only)

PART 1: FOUNDATIONS: WHY GENDER AND WOMEN'S STUDIES? WHY FEMINISM?

To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality.

—bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000, p. 110)

Part 1 addresses popular misconceptions and stereotypes about feminism and discusses men's engagements with feminism in contemporary North America. We review some markers of progress and continuing inequalities in Canada and the United States. The concept of "intersectionality" is introduced as a tool to understand diverse gendered experiences and the relations of women, men, and gender non-conforming people to systems of power and inequality.

Part 1A: This Is What a Feminist Looks Like

This section introduces you to different ways in which "feminism" has been understood and practiced in the past and present. The articles offer multiple definitions of feminism, examine its history and relevance, and consider the many myths and stereotypes associated with the term.

Learning/Unlearning

The following questions for reflection on the chapters in Part 1A can help guide classroom discussion around what a feminist looks like by inviting students to explore their positions relative to feminism and the assumptions made about feminism they have inevitably encountered.

1. What first comes to mind when you hear the word *feminism*?
 - a. Students might be invited to go around and share one word.
 - b. If preferred, students might write down a word or two that comes to mind when they hear "feminism."
 - c. At the end of class (or at the end of the course) this exercise might be repeated with an emphasis on any changes between the definitions.
2. Hooks shares her favourite definition of *feminism*: "Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (p. 18). Does this definition differ from the way you have previously understood feminism? If so, how? Do you share hooks' love for this definition, or is there an alternative definition that you prefer?

- a. Compare and contrast this definition to the definition Estelle Freedman offers in “The Historical Case for Feminism.” Which definition feels more whole or useful to you?
 - b. What does the word *privilege* mean to you?
 - c. Freedman’s definition includes a strong emphasis on privilege. What does she mean when she says “privilege”?
 - d. Does Freedman’s definition raise anything you hadn’t considered about privilege before?
3. Bromley makes a compelling argument for the need to consider various social movements together when exploring the history of feminism.
 - a. What does Bromley mean when she writes about “alignments”?
 - b. Did any of the links between movements she discusses surprise you?
 - c. What current social movements (e.g., #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, etc.) align with feminist consciousness raising in the 21st century?
4. What facets of life does Bromley describe as likely being very different if the feminist movement had not been successful?
 - a. Imagine, as Bromley explores, “what your life would look like if the women’s movement had not been so successful?”
 - b. How similar and/or different would your list look in response to the above question?
5. Nanibush reflects on how she does not feel comfortable claiming a feminist identity. Why is it important for Nanibush, an Anishinaabe woman, to use the word “Kwe” to explore her experiences in her body and social context (e.g., her experiences as an Indigenous woman, worker, daughter, etc.)?
 - a. Does the term *feminist* resonate for you?
 - b. Have you ever self-labelled as a feminist, or have you been labelled feminist?
6. What is the difference between *womanist* and *feminist*?
 - a. Using the excerpt from Alice Walker, which of these terms speaks most clearly to your experiences?
7. What is essentialism?
 - a. Can you think of some examples of gender essentialism?
 - b. What are some examples of the gender binary in everyday life? (e.g., bathrooms, gender reveal parties, “ladies and gentlemen,” etc.)
 - c. Why does Tarrant think essentialism is a barrier to women’s equality?

Envisioning Change

1. Bell hooks suggests we should reclaim clear definitions of feminism and spread them far and wide, in order to re-ignite feminist politics. Alone or with a group, discuss and/or design an advertisement illustrating one definition of, or statement about, feminism that appeals to you. This might take the form of a logo, a print ad, a radio or podcast ad, a TV ad, a T-shirt, a social media post, or another form of imagining.
2. Choose one of the social movements outlined in Victoria Bromley's essay (e.g., Indigenous, gay rights, racial justice, etc.). For your chosen social justice movement, outline its key principles, aims, or concepts. Discuss how these tenets align with feminist consciousness and the points of tension between feminist consciousness raising and the movement's aims.
3. Roxane Gay says she is a "bad feminist." What does she mean by this label? What do you think she is trying to say? Does her piece resonate with you? Why or why not? [Some students might want to discuss the ways in which they feel they are "bad" feminists.] Explore how Roxane Gay's essay does or does not challenge what the label "feminism" means to you. This might be done as a short free-writing exercise (5–10 min).
4. Which of the "15 Indigenous feminists to know" that Abaki Beck writes about interested you the most? Which of these women would you like to learn more about? Students might be asked to follow up on one of these women as a course assignment.
5. Starting women's and gender studies courses can feel challenging for people of any gender, particularly at a time in which we are told "feminism is over"—that there is no need for feminism anymore. As the authors illustrate, however, feminism is far from dead, and feminism can be made accessible to people who identify any place on the gender spectrum. What are some concrete awareness steps that you could take to invite others into a self-exploration related to women's and gender studies? Come up with a persona of someone you think might be hesitant to engage with women's and gender studies. Create a "pitch" that you would offer to that person, and explore their journey into the subject. You might consider a contingency plan in case your initial strategy goes awry. Draw on the works of feminist authors included in this part to make your pitch.

Additional Resources

- In a lecture at the New School on October 9, 2015, bell hooks explored feminism and popular culture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hb5kctc3UEk> (1 hour 52 min).