

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: TEACHING WOMEN'S STUDIES:
EXPLORING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN
TECHNOLOGY-RICH CLASSROOM
LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Kimberlee Staking, Doctor of Philosophy, 2013

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Studies

Although university students are key participants in knowledge-making processes, their insights about learning are sparsely documented, and too rarely considered in contemporary conversations in higher education. In centering the insights and experiences of students enrolled in two women's studies courses at the University of Maryland, this dissertation produces a substantive intervention that both democratizes and disrupts existing academic discourse. The research utilizes empirical data collected from students enrolled in three sections of Women's Studies 250: *Women, Art and Culture*, and from students enrolled in an online course, *Women's Health and Well-Being, Transnational Perspectives*, which was taught cross-institutionally at four universities in Africa, Israel and the United States.

Qualitative analysis of empirical data facilitated the description of processes by which women's studies students were engaged in classroom knowledge-making. Student texts, interpretively stitched together within a crystallized presentation format, produce a poly-vocal narrative illuminating the robustly material and multi-sensory nature of processes in, through, and by which participants transacted their learning. Collectively, their shared stories affirm the value of a technology-rich classroom praxis, one that facilitated dialogic and peer-centered learning processes, to students' active and productive engagement in collaborative knowledge-making endeavors.

Research findings also illuminate how such a praxis, scaffolded on dialogic engagement, and on the deployment of socio-constructivist pedagogies in a technology-rich learning environment, deepened participants' collaborations with one another as equally knowledgeable peers across difference, which simultaneously and materially facilitated their capabilities to critically and reflexively engage relevant knowledge frameworks. The strength of these findings attest to the benefits of focusing qualitative research on the nature of the transactional processes by and through which students are engaged in classroom learning. In explicitly asserting the value to learners of these material processes above others in facilitating collaborative knowledge-making transactions, this dissertation documents shared ownership in processes of classroom knowledge-making as an enabling factor in participants' abilities to capitalize on vital resources of peer diversity that, when mobilized, have the capacity to support potentially transgressive and tangibly transformative social justice outcomes for individuals and for the classroom learning community as a whole.

TEACHING WOMEN'S STUDIES: EXPLORING
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CLASSROOM LEARNING COMMUNITIES

By

Kimberlee Staking

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
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Doctor of Philosophy
2013

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Dedication

Dedicated with profound affection, appreciation, and heartfelt thanks to two teaching super stars no longer with us:

Dear friend, Karl Joseph Savage (1969-2010)

Beloved sister, Karrilee Van Vliet Robison (1959-2012)

Your generosity of spirit, so freely and abundantly shared, lit up our lives and the lives of those you taught. Your remarkable influence continues to be felt, and your *joie de vivre* is ever present in our hearts.

Acknowledgements

What does it take to write a dissertation? In my case, it required three laptops and was accomplished at half a dozen workstations through life transitions that transported our household from Silver Spring, Maryland to Fort Collins, Colorado, and then on to Fairfield, California. More than anything else, however, this dissertation was enabled by the generous support of others; it is a privilege to publicly acknowledge them here.

Institutional support at the University of Maryland has been critical to the successful completion of this dissertation. Graduate teaching assistantships in the Department of Art History & Archaeology, and in the Department of Women's Studies both sustained me, and provoked me to continually challenge myself. Museum internships awarded from the Department of Art History & Archaeology nurtured my development as a feminist art historian, and provided me the marvelous opportunity to work with Harriet McNamee at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, and with Ann Shumard at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery. Grants from the Center of Teaching Excellence, and from the Curriculum Transformation Project, directed by Deborah Rosenfelt, were instrumental in helping me to theorize my dissertation research inquiry while I was completing my graduate coursework. Travel awards administered by the Graduate School and the College of Arts and Humanities permitted me to attend and to present at academic conferences, and the Evelyn T. Beck Dissertation Research Award from the Department of Women's Studies generously supported my work on the dissertation prospectus.

Opportunities to be a student and to teach students have shaped the contours of my experience at the University of Maryland – initially in the Department of Art History & Archaeology, and subsequently in the Department of Women’s Studies. Courses in the College of Education and in American Studies further enriched my learning. Graduate students with whom I’ve shared the classroom have deepened my understanding of and commitment to teaching as social justice. Women’s Studies graduate students in cohorts from 2002 to the present have blazed stunning paths of activist scholarship, and I proudly count it a rare privilege to have been associated with them as colleagues; many have also become valued friends. A special debt of gratitude to Robyn Epstein, Clare Jen, Ryan Shanahan, and Kimberly Williams for their mentoring expertise through General Exams, and a heart-felt shout out of appreciation to those in my own cohort, La Bianca Laureano, Angel Love Miles, Jing Song, and Barbara Boswell. Barbara’s always sagely spot-on advice, and her many hours as a willing reader are gifts I can never repay.

Students in general, and in particular those 113 students enrolled in Women’s Studies 250 and Women’s Studies 498k whom I had the marvelous good fortune to teach in 2006-2007, are the *raison d’être* of this research. I express enormous gratitude to each of them for their participation as research informants. In studying their peer transactions, I have acquired transformative insights into the transgressive potential of the classroom as a site of communal knowledge-making. Their voices have been astute guides and writing companions, and their experiences as collaborative learning partners in women’s studies courses are rightfully the focus of this dissertation. To my four transnational colleagues in the Women’s Health and

Well-Being project, my profound expression of gratitude for their voluntary, enthusiastic, and exemplary commitment to the idea of the course, and for their capable, tenacious, and visionary leadership as feminist pedagogues. Collaborating in this endeavor with Vivienne Bozalek, Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, Rivka Tuval-Mashiach, and Yasmeen Yusuf-Khalil was an extraordinarily meaningful, exhilarating, and life-altering experience.

Other acts of mentorship and support for whose singular assistance I am greatly indebted in the shaping of this dissertation include members of the Women's Studies faculty, and the members of my dissertation committee, John Caughey, Jo Paoletti, and Josephine Withers. Simply put, the entire project would have foundered many times over without the superb support and patient guidance of my committee chairs Deborah Rosenfelt and Katie King. All of these committee members have also inspired me with their brilliant scholarship and their impassioned commitment to teaching. I am indeed honored to have their signatures on this dissertation. Current or former members of the University of Maryland community whose supportive contributions to the dissertation are also gratefully acknowledged include Annie Carter, Dave Eubanks, Louse Greene, Cliffonia Royals-Howard, Marvin Lynn, Claire Moses, Laura and Catherine Nichols, Paul Mihailidis, Eden Segal, Mary Corbin Sies, and those students, co-facilitators, and staff with whom I worked in the Intergroup Dialogue: Words of Engagement Program.

Throughout this process, I have been blessed and sustained by continuous support from East Coast friends and West Coast family - their love has been an all-encompassing embrace. Thanks to dear friends and walking partners of many years'

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Parents Myrth and Claude Van Vliet, children Sasha Robinson and Grant Staking, their respective spouses Alex and Alemitu, siblings, in-laws, nieces and nephews have all offered unqualified affection and confidence in my ability to climb this mountain and reach the heights at last. Outstanding teachers in their own right, and delightful friends and companions as well as mother and daughter to me, Myrth and Sasha have been a special inspiration. Thanks, too, to mother-in-law Annelise for her unwavering belief, and to granddaughter Annalise, whose presence in my life is both a gift and a never-ending source of joy.

Without financial support as well as unconditional love from my parents, I would never have begun my post secondary education in 1972. I marvel now to realize how much I took this for granted at the time, without any recognition of the

willing investment of scarce resources that it represented on their part. Without financial support, unconditional love, and daily sacrifice from my incomparable spouse Kim, I would never have begun my post graduate education in 1995 – nor have been able to stay the course through two master’s degrees to reach this moment. Sharing life’s journeys – and its joys – with him over the past 37 years has enriched my life beyond measure. His many signal contributions to the project of this dissertation, including technical contributions in the construction of charts, and in editing/formatting, represent a quietly unsung and patiently offered gift of supportive partnership equal to the response of its demands – one that is truly monumental in proportion, its scope beyond my ability to fully acknowledge.

As a newly minted graduate student, overwhelmed with the permeably porous boundaries I encountered between my public and private life spheres, I appropriated the second wave feminist slogan “The personal is political,” adapting it to read “The personal is academic.” To my delighted surprise, the process of dissertating has been joyfully sweetened across the years of labor by this blending and blurring of my social worlds. I am gratefully indebted to all these individuals – family members, friends, colleagues, mentors, and students – who have continuously extended themselves beyond all expectation; their ever-abundant supply of encouragement and support has contributed so materially to my well-being throughout the arduous moments of this journey. Even as I have worked to theorize the dividends of collaborative classroom learning, I have been fortunate beyond measure to have experienced firsthand across the borders of the personal and academic the tangible benefits of so many richly collaborative relationships. April 20, 2013

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Chapter One: Research Project, Protocols & Methodologies

I have learned to be more understanding of others in a variety of ways: ability, race, gender, and class in particular. By having a diverse class, I have seen other's perspectives (mainly race) as they relate to my classmates. It's one thing to hear that stereotypes are bad, but it's more effective to hear students' stories of how they have been discriminated against. I think people's personal stories and discussions are most helpful. Group is also a great way to meet different people and explore diversity.

—Student, *Women, Art and Culture* (2006)

I really enjoyed that some of the assignments were just to give comments regarding our virtual classmates work and that I was also given comments from them. This motivated me and made the work very interesting and the responses were something to look forward to. It furthermore made the learning much more enjoyable and I think I got a lot out of the course without even realizing that I was learning so much.

—Student, *Women's Health and Well-Being* (2007)

Introduction

Although students are key participants in classroom knowledge-making at the university level, insights about their classroom experiences are too sparsely documented, let alone thoughtfully considered in contemporary institutional discussions about learning in higher education. Critical educators exploring student participation, however, indicate that observations offered by learners are r/evolutionary and merit careful scrutiny (Robert B. Barr and John Tagg, 1995; Jacqueline Cossentino, 2004; Henry Giroux, 2005, 2011, 2012; bell hooks, 1995; David Trend, 1992, 2001; Judith Summerfield and Crystal Benedicks, 2007).¹

In focusing on knowledge-making experiences from the perspective of student informants, this dissertation is both a valuable and a substantive intervention into

academic conversations about classroom learning in higher education. Methods of qualitative analysis and crystallized writing theorized by Adele E. Clarke (2005), and by Laura L. Ellingson (2009), have provided useful models for scaffolding re/representations of informant data to produce a richly poly-vocal narrative of learning transactions that both disrupts and democratizes existing academic discourse. Student informants were enrolled in two women's studies courses at the University of Maryland (2006-2007). Interpretively stitched together, student narratives illuminate the robustly material and multi-sensory range of transactional processes in, through, and by which classroom participants were engaged in collaborative knowledge-making endeavors. In the sharing of student texts, this dissertation collectively narrates compelling stories about the value to students' knowledge-making processes of designing and facilitating dialogic, and collaborative peer-learning transactions around the deployment of digital technologies.

This contribution of student voice is all the more timely as increasingly corporatized structures and resource streams impact university policy and decision-making decisions (Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, 1999; 2004). The narratives of knowledge-making emerging from my research engagement with student informants provide alternative and more complexly nuanced understandings of classroom learning processes and outcomes than those yielded through quantitative evaluations measuring a narrowly commodity-based calibration of student performance.² Based on research findings, this dissertation also articulates a significantly more expansive vision of the constructivist potential in technology-mediated classroom teaching than

the too-often asserted notion of their utility as a means to reduce and re-structure the costs of traditional classrooms in response to shifting resource allocations.

As instructor in the courses that served as research venues, I made pedagogical decisions scaffolding the design by and through which students were prompted to participate in classroom knowledge-making processes. Similarly, my decisions as the researcher and author of this dissertation to utilize inductive forms of inquiry and qualitative methods of analysis in reporting research findings frame the means by which readers are invited to engage students' stories of knowledge-making. In transparently acknowledging my multiple roles in constructing this narrative, and in privileging the experiences of student research participants engaged in iteratively transformative processes of learning praxis, I invite readers also to become active participants in this multi-voiced dialogue (Paolo Freire, 2004; David Kolb, 1984). I anticipate that as they do so, readers will (as did many student participants), construct a more richly nuanced appreciation of learning as cycles of sensory perceiving and processing transactions (David Kolb, 1984; John Dewey, 1916, 1938).

My initial provocation for undertaking this research was the *felt* dissatisfaction I experienced with my teaching as a graduate student in the Women's Studies Department at the University of Maryland (2003-2007).³ Despite evidence of student satisfaction and competence in achieving stated learning objectives, I sensed that I was not facilitating genuinely transformative knowledge-making opportunities for learners. This perception was compounded by my sense that students were not critically engaging with one another, or with the course themes, in ways that were

consistent with the social justice orientation of the course. These observations produced in me a *troubling disturbance* akin to the “teaching perplexities” chronicled by educator and progressive reformer Jane Addams (1902).⁴

In seeking to address my unsettling disquiet, I began a series of intentional dialogues with students and colleagues, and began reading the work of many feminists and critical educators including, Leanna Marie Eaton (2001); Berenice Malka Fisher (2001); Maralle Mayberry & Ellen Cronan Rose (1999); Edmund V. O'Sullivan, Amish Morrell & Mary Ann O'Connor (2000); and Kathleen Weiler (1991). Over time I re-conceptualized my notion of the classroom as a feminist learning community in which knowledge-making was intentionally constructed as a collaborative endeavor. My engagement with socio-constructivist learning theory also prompted me to re-conceptualize my role as that of a guide and facilitator. I worked to design opportunities that would enable students to experience their interactions with one another in this manner – as a relationship of knowledgeable peers, collaboratively interrogating, and co-constructing knowledge together as members of a classroom learning community (Marcia B. Magolda Baxter & Patricia M. King, 2004).⁵ Participation in two grants from the University of Maryland’s Center for Teaching Excellence encouraged me to experiment with social and digital media technologies as a means of prompting these student-centered learning partnerships (Susan Lea, David Stephenson & Juliette Troy, 2003).⁶

Transdisciplinary feminist discourse theorizing teaching and learning as a social justice project have configured all aspects of this research. This orientation has

assisted me to design classroom learning opportunities in which the elaboration of new objects of knowledge is prompted through knowledge-making processes and practices that are mutually reciprocal and collaboratively negotiated across boundaries of difference (Susan Stanford Friedman, 1997; Katie King, 1994, 2001, 2002, 2012; Julie Thompson Klein, 1996; Elizabeth St. Pierre & Wanda S. Pillow, 2000). Indeed, scholarship construing teaching and learning as a form of social justice praxis has been central both to my initial experimentation in socio-constructivist classroom design, and to my subsequent research aiming to better understand and represent learner experiences of knowledge-making in women's studies classrooms with such an orientation (Henry A. Giroux & Peter McLaren, 1986; Rebecca A. Goldstein, 2007; Patti Lather, 1986, 1991; Peter Mayo, 1999; and Eugene F. Provenzo Jr., 1997, 2006).

As I theorized and implemented this robustly transactional and student-centered approach to classroom knowledge-making processes, I noted anecdotally that women's studies students appeared to engage one another more effectively as learning peers than I had observed in teaching similar courses previously – while continuing to report high levels of satisfaction with their course experience. Moreover, their collaboratively produced assignments and culminating projects appeared to evidence a greater degree of critically reflective engagement with relevant knowledge frameworks. Hoping to substantiate these anecdotal observations and seeking to discover more about how students experienced their classroom collaborations, I invited their participation in this research. I anticipated that by

including the voices of students (who are key, if underrepresented stakeholders in conversations about learning in higher education), this dissertation would contribute relevant insights into learners' knowledge-making processes that would benefit teacher/scholars across the university community.

Framing the Research Project, Protocols, and Methodologies

All aspects of human being and knowing are situated.

— Elizabeth McCarthy (1997, p. 107)

The graphic overview of Chapter One, below, situates the framework grounding the protocols I constructed for this research inquiry. In Chapters One and Two, I describe the theoretical and transdisciplinary scholarship that have scaffolded this framework. In Chapters Three through Six, I interpretively stitch together the storied quilt of voice emerging from student data, combining analysis of texts constructed by students in completing tasks in women's studies courses, together with narratives they authored reflecting on their learning.

Chapter One Overview	
<p>Research Project, Protocols, and Methodologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Framing the Research Project, Protocols, and Methodologies • Research Venues & Data Sources • Critical Collaborations • The Methodology Toolkit: Scholarly Resources • Data Analysis • Data Mapping • Telling Participant Stories in Academic Writing • Deploying Crystallization in Writing Qualitative Research • Framework: Centering Students' Narrative Voices 	<p>Animating Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What might students share with me about their experiences as learners in women's studies courses? 2. How might a qualitative methods approach reveal relevant participant insights about their learning experiences? 3. What methodological frameworks will facilitate the collection and analysis of empirical data in conducting this inductive inquiry? 4. What presentation formats will best facilitate a dissertation narrative that communicates the polyphonic diversity of student voice and experience?

Figure 1: Overview of Chapter One with Animating Questions

The Research Venues

Data was contributed by 113 students enrolled in two women's studies courses at the University of Maryland in 2006-2007. Although the physical and technology environments for the two courses, *Introduction to Women's Studies: Women, Art and Culture* (WAC) and *Women's Health and Well-Being: Transnational Perspectives* (WHWB) were differently configured, participants in both courses were intentionally prompted to critically engage themes in women's studies through collaborative transactional processes that were dialogic, student-centered, and technology-rich.

Textbox insertions are one component of the crystallized multi-genre writing format I have constructed to present research results. They permit me to share elements of my reflective process without disrupting the main narrative flow.

Student-centered learning processes grounded in critical, feminist, and socio-constructivist theoretical frameworks will be described more fully as part of the interpretive framework accompanying student texts in subsequent chapters.

Briefly, these processes included:

- Dialogic exchange to facilitate the development of student voice while simultaneously validating others' differentially informed experiences;
- Authenticity in prompting tasks requiring peers to engage one another as equally knowledgeable partners in the negotiation of new understandings and in the exchange of critical feedback; and
- The use of communication tools, social media, and digital technologies to facilitate processes of collaborative learning.

Eighty undergraduate students contributed data from three sections of the *Women, Art and Culture* (WAC) course taught in the spring and fall semesters of 2006.⁷ Offered each semester by the Women's Studies department, the WAC course fulfills university CORE learning electives required for all undergraduates. To students from disciplines outside of Women's Studies, it offers an opportunity to explore the field of women's studies through the prism of women's creative production "as expressed in relation to families, religion, education, ethnicity, class, and sexuality."⁸ It also doubles as a requirement for students wishing to earn a certificate, minor, or major in Women's Studies. Additional description of the WAC course, and the blended learning environment in which I taught sections serving as venues for research collection, is provided in Chapters Three and Four as part of the thickly interpretative framework for my *re/representation* of participant narratives.⁹

Women's Health and Well-Being, Transnational Perspectives (WHWB) was an online course co-designed by myself and colleagues domiciled at institutions in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. It was taught in the spring of 2007.¹⁰ Thirty-three students contributed research data. All were enrolled in women and gender studies programs at one of the following institutions: Bar-Ilan University (Israel), Makerere University (Uganda), University of Maryland (U.S.A.), and the University of the Western Cape (South Africa).¹¹ Approximately one-third of the participants were in graduate programs, while the remainder were in the final year of undergraduate studies. The course, which fulfilled elective requirements at each of the participating institutions, brought a comparative transnational focus to the exploration of women's health and well-being. A socio-constructivist course design, prompting students to learn by doing together, directed virtual peers to examine, collectively, the impact of lived experience (including differential access to resources) on women's health and well-being across geographic contexts.

Working collaboratively across institutional and national borders, participants investigated factors of difference such as ability, age, class, education, ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexual orientation on women's health in each of the relevant socio-cultural, geographic, historical, and political contexts. Additional description about the course is provided in Chapters Five and Six as part of the thickly interpretative scaffold framing my re/representation of participant texts. The collaborative work, and the generous intellectual support offered by the four colleagues with whom I worked in co-designing and team-teaching the WHWB

course, was critical to the realization of this dissertation project, as was the informed consent for data collection granted by students in both women's studies courses.

Data Sources

In hoping to substantiate my impressions from participant observation and the initial feedback from students, I cast a broad net in collecting data. While I was chiefly interested in exploring what women's studies students would indicate about their knowledge-making experiences in a feminist learning environment that was socio-constructivist and technology-rich, I was also curious to discover what other stories about learning their voices might tell. Data collection in both venues included work submitted as assignments as well as writing submitted in online discussion forums and in reflection journals. I documented group projects, engaged in participant observation, and asked students to voluntarily complete qualitative mid- and end-of-semester evaluations. I also invited them to participate in *ex post* interviews.

Primary Data Sources

Data collection from 113 was accomplished under the auspices of the University of Maryland's Institutional Research Board.¹²

Student assignments: Course assignments prompted students to explore women as producers of visual culture (WAC) or women's experiences of health and well-being (WHWB).¹³

Student evaluations: Student participants in each course were asked to provide both qualitative and quantitative feedback about their course experiences through a number of evaluation instruments; templates of these are in possession of the author. Open-ended questions prompted students in the WAC course to comment on learning activities and experiences they found to be particularly engaging and/or effective; students in the WHWB course submitted feedback about their online learning experiences in guided reflective essays. Students in both

courses also completed self and peer evaluations for their group work and collaborative projects. Whenever possible, anonymity of responses was assured (although this was more difficult to achieve in the online WHWB course). A summary of findings from data collected from each venue is included in the relevant chapters of this dissertation.

Peer-to-peer discussion forums, and individual learning journals: In both courses, students participated extensively in dialogically structured discussion forums (online and face-to-face in the WAC course; entirely online in the WHWB course). Students in both courses also periodically submitted online learning journals. Excerpts from each are re/produced in subsequent chapters as part of my re-telling stories of learner engagement.

Focus groups and individual interviews: Focus groups for participants in all three sections of the WAC courses were convened in April 2007. Individual interviews were conducted on campus in May 2007 with members of the WHWB course who had been enrolled at the University of the Maryland, and online interviews were conducted with participants from geographically distant cohorts. As per IRB protocols, student participation in *ex post facto* conversations was completely voluntary; participants were recruited randomly from the entire roster of students. Interviews and focus groups were semi-structured but open-ended, inviting students to reflectively share their perceptions of their course experiences. These sessions were recorded and transcribed and are in the possession of the author. Excerpts are included in subsequent chapters.

Supplemental Data

Also in the author's possession are hard copies of my responses to student learning journals, to their participation in discussion forums, and all evaluations completed in response to group projects. Narrative grade reports for all students are also in author archives.

Critical Collaborations

Scholarly engagement with socio-constructivist teaching frameworks was materially enhanced by my opportunities as a participant in conferences, and university grants, and workshops. These contributed significantly to this dissertation project, assisting me to:

- design a more feminist-centered classroom learning environment;
- sharpen my use of new media communication technologies for prompting and facilitating peer collaborations in knowledge-making processes; and
- develop qualitative research approaches and methodological tools.

Figure 2, below, summarizes the timeline of these collaborations with respect to my research project.

Perhaps most significantly, through these collaborations, I discovered critical and feminist theories relevant to my project across a range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields, including Art History, American Studies, Education, Visual Culture/Critical Media Studies, and Women's Studies. My transdisciplinary knowledge base was further broadened when I collaborated with feminist colleagues in the fields of Psychology and Social Work to design the online *Women's Health and Well-Being* course. It was amplified as well by our collective commitment in that course to dialogic uses of technologies in the virtual classroom, and by the breadth of disciplinary, socio-cultural, institutional, and (inter)national affiliations, together with lived experiences, which we shared, together with the WHWB student participants and staff with whom we interacted.

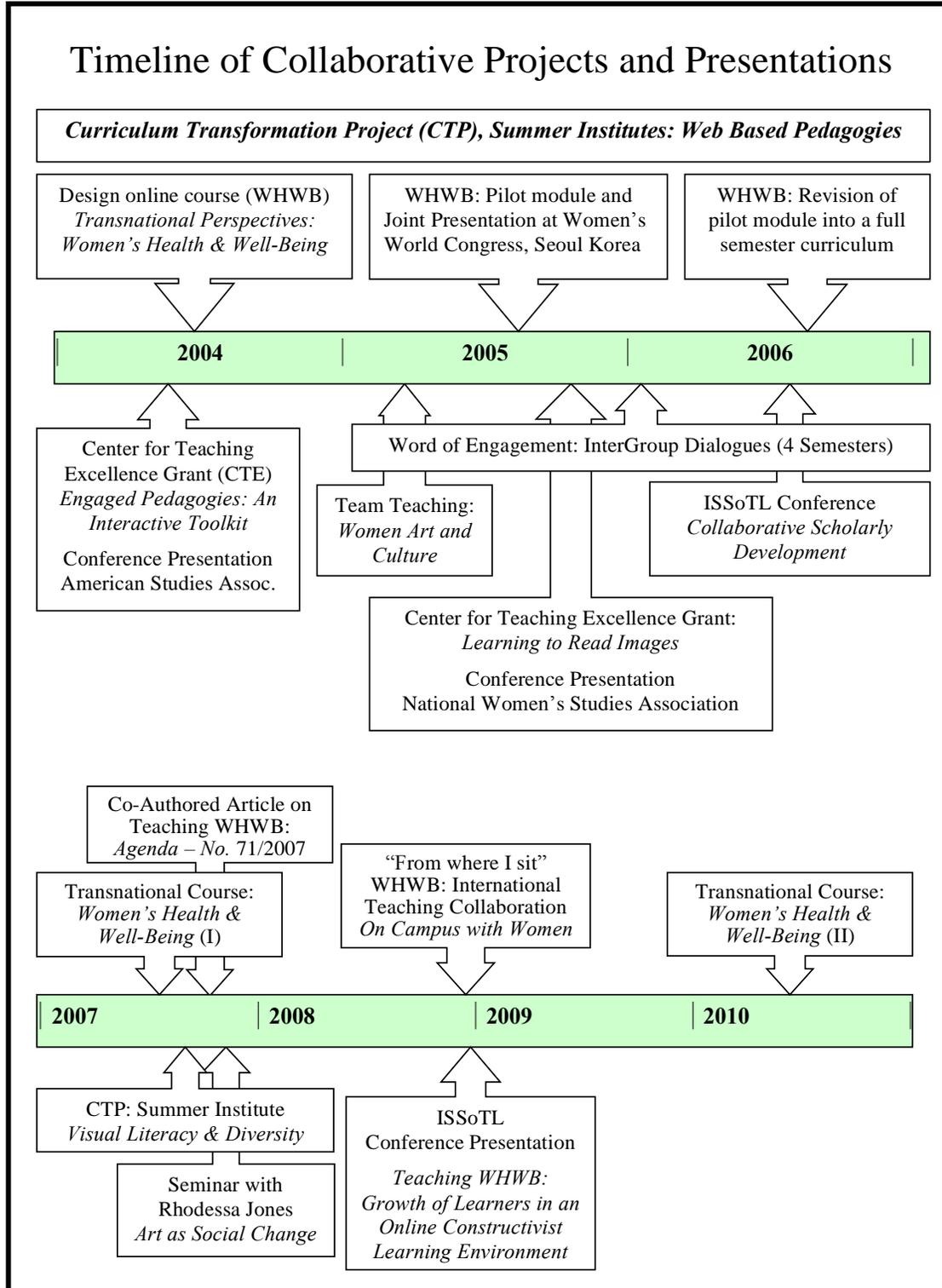


Figure 2: Timeline of Important Collaborations for Dissertation Research¹⁴

Collaborative opportunities for research also occurred at many extra-disciplinary sites including, at the University of Maryland, The Consortium for Race, Gender, and Ethnicity (CRGE), The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), The Curriculum Transformation Project (CTP), and the Words of Engagement, Intergroup Dialogue program at the Office of Human Relations Programs.¹⁵ Work conducted in collaboration with colleagues, chiefly Paul Mihaildis and Eden Segal, through the auspices of the inter-institutionally sited Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has also proved extraordinarily fruitful (Pat Hutchings, 2000; Lee S. Shulman, 2004a, 2004b; Etienne Wenger, 1998).¹⁶ Graduate courses taught by American Studies faculty members John Caughey, Jo Paoletti, and Mary Corbin Sies enacted collaborative pathways to knowledge-making that were electrifyingly transformative in their constructivist use of technologies, and that were instrumental in assisting me to imagine how I might deploy student-centered pedagogies and technologies in the courses for which I was the instructor.

Chapter Two further describes the ways in which my scholarly inquiries into collaborative knowledge-making across these multiple communities of practice have assisted me to construct the theoretical scaffold undergirding the dissertation project (Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, 1999).¹⁷ As noted in the chapter overview above, the remainder of this chapter discusses the methodological toolkit I constructed to collect and analyze data, and to interpretively re/represent my research findings to audiences sited across the many knowledge-making communities of practices referenced above.

The Methodology Toolkit: Scholarly Resources

As I collected data, I recognized the need for tools that would enable me to be attentive to, and to adequately re/represent the heterogeneous complexities of learner experience reported by participants. However, I also required tools that would assist me to excavate and theorize clusters of thematic convergence emerging from data as participant voices were discursively placed in conversation together. Finally, I required an approach that would assist me to transparently acknowledge the significance of the many roles I enacted throughout the project as I was by turns instructor, learner, observer, participant, researcher, and writer. In constructing a toolkit to meet these requirements, I have been influenced by participant-focused methods of conducting qualitative research, such as narrative ethnography, participant observation, and phenomenology. Adele E. Clark, Laura L. Ellingson, Beth Graybill, and Patti Lather have each engaged in, and theorized, collaborative and ethical methods of conducting research with informants that have been particularly influential models (Janet Wolff, 1995).¹⁸

In *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Post Modern Turn* (2005), Adele Clarke constructs a framework for purposefully sifting raw data in ways that will reveal rather than refuse the complexities of conducting qualitative research, explaining:

My interventions explicitly seek to challenge the status-quo of research as focused on commonalities-as-core, to rupture the taken-for-grantedness of the normal curve, and instead to place differences, complexities, and silences at the analytic core. I hope to legitimate simultaneously attending to the social as well as to individual voices,

to the nonhuman as well as to the human, and to producing further analytics of the discursive and interactive practices of power (p. 295).

Patti Lather and Chris Smithies' multi-voiced study, *Troubling the Angels: Women Living With HIV/Aids* (1997), and Beth Graybill's ethnographic narrative, *Amish Women, Business Sense: Old Order Women Entrepreneurs in the Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Tourist Marketplace* (2009), heightened my understanding of the responsibilities that accompany interpretative re/representation of informant voice; they underscored for me the importance of being both transparent and clear about the choices I make in so doing. Graybill's work explicitly calls attention to this research challenge, noting, "Every researcher has an agenda; some are simply more aware of it than others." (62).¹⁹ Ellingson's conceptual lens, *Engaging Crystallization in Qualitative Research* (2009), describes the utility of interweaving multiple writing genres in constructing the presentation of qualitative research results. Further detailed in Chapter Two are the ways in which Ellingson's work multiplied my ability to highlight the extraordinary richness present in the data so as to meaningfully extrapolate its relevance to conversations about teaching and learning in higher education.

Framework: Data Analysis

The power of the postmodern lies in its flexibility . . . If empirical work is to move toward rather than away from difference(s) and complexities – to me – the heart of the postmodern project – we need tools that enable us to see difference(s), handle them analytically, and rerepresent them in fathomable ways that can travel.

— Adele Clarke (2005, p. 292)

As Clarke notes above, one of the challenges with qualitative work in the contemporary moment is to fashion research protocols that will foreground, rather than obscure, the complexities of difference in the situation being investigated. Her analytic and situationally grounded framework builds purposefully on Anselm Strauss's discourse theory to focus researcher attention on her/his own positionality in the collection, analysis, and reporting of empirical data.²⁰ She argues that an ethically responsible approach to qualitative work obliges the researcher to proceed inductively, and to remain visibly "present" in the analysis. Additionally, researcher accountability is most likely to be achieved, Clarke asserts, with the focus on *situations* as the "fundamental unit of analysis."

Clarke posits that in grounding analysis in the situation, the researcher overcomes the confining assumption of modernism's objectivity, which functions to enforce an artificial separation of the researcher from the context of the research in which s/he is engaged. Further emphasizing the artificiality and (im)permeability of modernism's discursively established boundaries of difference, and highlighting the accountability that inheres in the person-hood of the researcher, she writes that "everything in the situation both constitutes and affects most everything else in the situation in some way(s)." Situational analysis has been a critical frame in this project, one that has continuously prompted me to be relationally intentional in writing about the elements constituting processes by students were prompted to knowledge-making endeavors, and in subsequently constructing a framework by which to re/produce texts illuminating these transactions.

Framework: Mapping Data

Mapping opens up knowledge spaces. Maps are great boundary objects – devices for handling multiplicity, heterogeneity, and messiness in ways that can travel. Because maps are visual representations, they helpfully rupture . . . our normal ways of working and may provoke us to see things afresh.

— Adele Clarke (2005, p. 30)

Clarke theorizes data mapping as a strategy that continuously enables the researcher to remain present in her/his analysis. She underscores that this approach prompts researchers to be “answerable for what we learn how to see”. Mapping, the nuts and bolts of Clarke’s methodology, undergirds her strategic and purposeful approach to the re/representation of informant data. The process of mapping data proved extremely useful to the project of analyzing texts collected from student research participants. It created space to ask questions of the data, and to see that multiple responses are constituted in the voices of informants. Clarke suggests that the researcher “query” the data by asking questions such as the following: “What is the data about? What is going on? What are these stories? What are the discourses in the broader situation? Who is involved in producing these discourses? What and who do they construct? How? What and with whom are they in dialogue about? What and who do they render invisible? How? What material things—nonhuman elements—are involved and how do they configure the human actors?”²¹

Clarke’s suggestion to memo extensively throughout the process of data mapping proved helpful in engaging the “topics of controversies, the silences and the patterns of collective commitment” discursively embedded in the data. In tacking back and forth between modes of analysis such as mapping and memo-ing, I

discovered possibilities for engaging the reader more intentionally in the dialogic exchanges that were embedded in the data.²² As I deployed mapping to “inductively yet analytically construct the situation of inquiry empirically,” I discovered means by which to exploit the diversity of experience and funds of knowledge present in student data. Mapping has also greatly facilitated the conveyance of discursive knowledges about otherness and difference, contained in the texts of student informants, across disciplinary boundary spaces, and communities of practice.

Clarke theorizes three types of mapping exercises to produce comparative cartographic analyses of empirical data. Engaging data through these mapping exercises, I excavated, and visually deciphered, the complexities of knowledge-making processes present in student data. In plotting discursive trajectories, I began to imagine practices for re/representing these transactions. Identifying specific situational elements indicated through data mapping to have been most significant to participant learning engagement enabled me to transform empirical data into findings that are responsive to animating research questions.

Graphic matrices (below), adapted from Clarke’s schematic model of research inquiry serve to illustrate the relative strength of conditional situational elements to students’ knowledge-making experiences (figures 3 and 4). In the data chapters describing each of the research venues from which data were collected, I have selectively re/represented texts most reflective of the relative strength of the conditional elements highlighted in these matrices below, as these were the stories most insistently present in student data.

If this dissertation were “telling the stories” of learner engagement primarily from my perspectives as instructor and researcher, further elements with/in the situations of action would also have been highlighted as having been of equal (or of greater) significance. These would have included *non-human actants* and *institutional discourse*. The stories of learner engagement that I “tell” in this dissertation are chiefly those reflecting the perspectives of student informants emerging from situational analysis of empirical data.

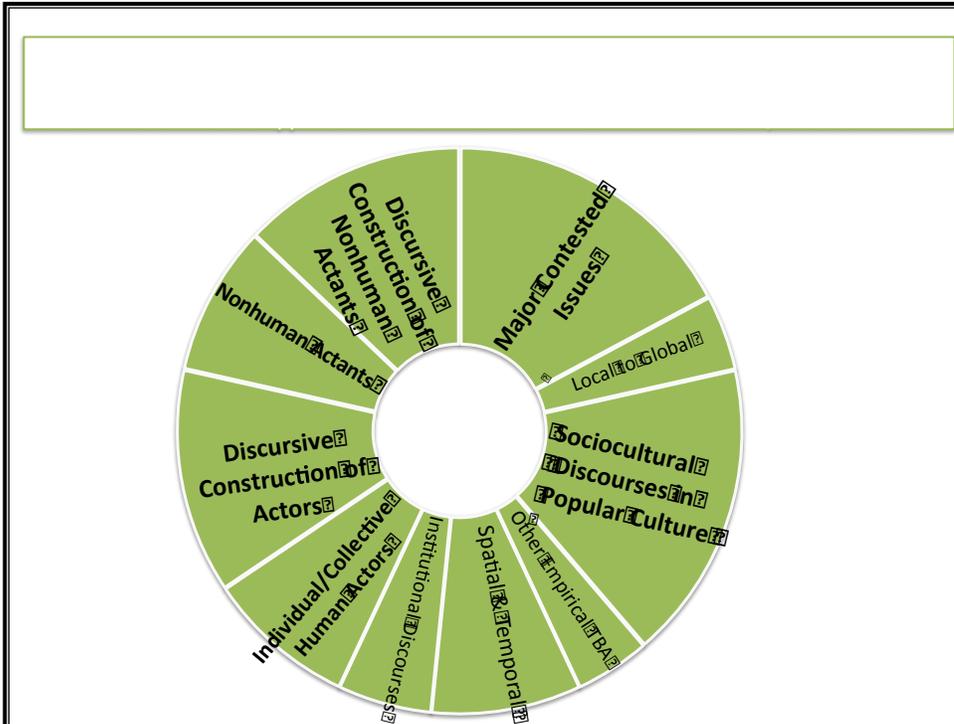


Figure 3: Situational Matrix for the *Women, Art, and Culture* course

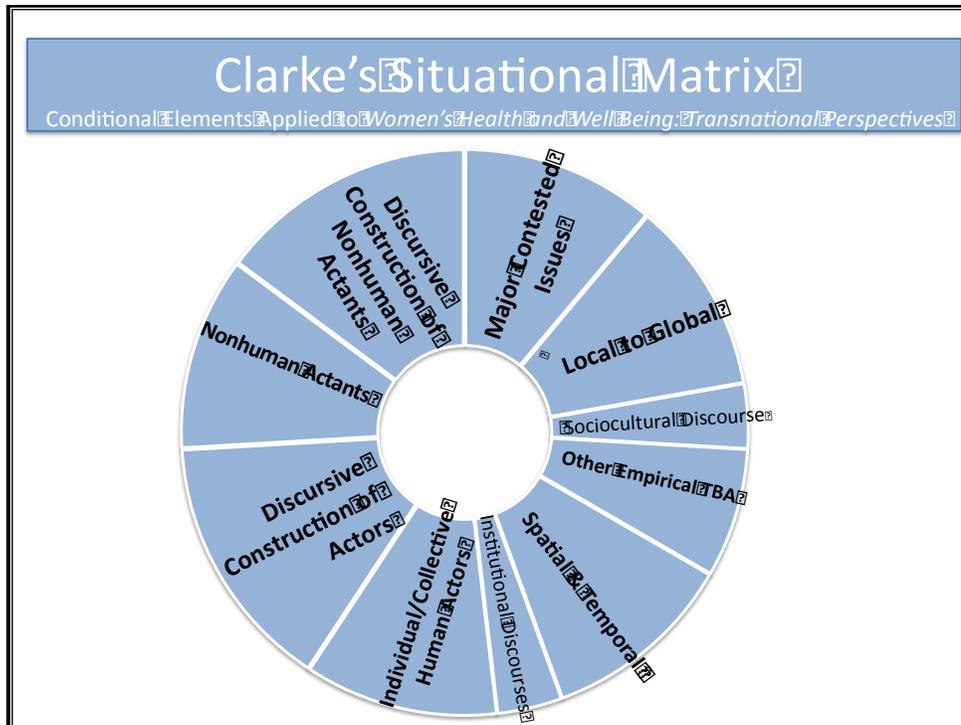


Figure 4: Situational Matrix for *Women's Health and Well-Being* course

A comparative examination of these figures indicates which situational elements were perceived by student informants in each venue to have been most relevant to their classroom learning experiences. Notwithstanding the strong significance of “contested issues” in both venues, the matrix for the WAC course illuminates the fact that “contested issues” together with “sociocultural discourse,” were the dominant elements in that situation. Given the thematic focus in the WAC course on women as produced by and as producers of visual culture, it is not altogether surprising that these elements emerged from analysis of student data as critical to their learning processes. Many of the contested issues were precisely those considering the relationships between contemporary cultural discourses and the social

construction of difference. Although students in the WAC course primarily met in a face-to-face learning environment, the use of new media technologies in knowledge-making transactions (tagged in the matrix under “discursive construction of actors/actants”) was also strongly acknowledged as having been highly significant to students.²³

On the other hand, given that many of the virtual and transnational transactions shaping modes of engagement in the WHWB course were quite unique in learners’ classroom experiences, it is not surprising that digital technologies emerged as the strongest conditional element. Other processes noted by informants as significant to their learning are captured in the matrix under the tags “local to global” and “spatial and temporal.” Participant texts from both venues (illustrating the ways in which their knowledge-making transactions were constituted by these elements), are descriptively situated and re/produced in Chapters Three through Six.

Framework: Telling Participant Stories in Academic Writing

What is drawing me and, I believe, other scholars to write personally is a desire to abandon the alienating ‘metalanguage’ that closes, rather than opens, the doors of academe to all those who wish to enter. Personal writing represents a sustained effort to democratize the academy. Indeed, it emerges from the struggles of those traditionally excluded from the academy, such as women and members of minority groups, to find a voice that acknowledges both their sense of difference and their belated arrival on the scholarly scene.²⁴

— Ruth Behar

Data mapping enabled me to identify salient and compelling stories of participant learning experiences. Scholarly work that “writes narrative” *with* informants, as theorized and practices by feminist ethnographers Ruth Behar, Beth

Graybill, and Patti Lather, among others, provided me with models for constructing a framework by which to re/represent student stories while remaining reflexively attentive to my own authorial voice.²⁵ In the interweaving of informant voices alongside their own, each explicitly frames their re/representation of research data in ways that are both less hierarchical and more democratic. Their methodologies have greatly enabled my construction of a document re/representing findings in a framework flexible enough to accommodate both the diversity of participant voice, and the convergence of oppositional ways of knowledge-making present in learner's experiences in women's studies courses.

Patti Lather has persistently pushed boundaries to find means by which to authentically re/represent the other in her work. Her use of voice in radically transgressive representational modes simultaneously centers, and exposes its paradoxical capacity to discursively silence, rather than to acknowledge difference. Lather's approach to challenging oppressively silencing practices is to place questions of difference, embodiment, gender, and power at the center of her process of conducting qualitative research. I have found her process of critically exploring such questions in tandem with research informants to have assisted me to be more reflective about my own research and writing decisions (Lather, 1986).²⁶ Lather's work continually critiques the problematic invisibility of power when researchers fail to acknowledge their positionality and situated-ness with respect to populations being investigated.²⁷ Lather's work with Chris Smithies (1997) chronicles the shared knowledge-making experiences of women with HIV/Aids in support groups. It has

been for me a revelatory and a tangibly concrete model for writing the stories of student research participants through a crystallizing prism that attempts to adequately reflect the socio-cultural inequities to which their voices call attention.²⁸

Beth Graybill's dissertation exploring the business practices of Amish women marketing to the tourist industry in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, has been another significant model for me of working to achieve social justice outcomes through conducting and writing qualitative research. Her collaborative approach "tells" the stories of her informant population by centering voices that are relevant to scholarly discourse, but that have been both underrepresented and too often "spoken for" in traditional ethnographic research. Graybill's dissertation demonstrates the transformative potential of conducting what I have come to think of as *subject-centered* qualitative research. Theorizing the *creative* and the *constructive* potentials of narrative ethnographic work, she notes its singular quality to engage readers through the re/telling of participant stories:

While many of us present our ethnographic work as simple description of our informants' reality, in fact, our accounts as well as the self-understandings of our research participants are both interpretations of culture . . . both are constructions that require selecting out certain information to create a usable narrative. Quoting Geertz (1973), these interpretations are thus "fictions in the sense that they are 'something made,' 'something fashioned' –the original meaning of fiction– not that they are false, unfactual, or merely 'as if' thought experiments." Ethnography is story-telling, and as such it is an imminently accessible medium, more so than most methodologies (p. 62).

Graybill's practice of telling stories with (rather than of) her under-studied and significantly under-represented research informants prompted me to center the voices of my own informants in re/representing their learning experiences. Citing Geertz

again, Graybill asserts this practice to be a contributory factor in the production of research that is both purposefully significant to research participants, and uniquely illuminating for multiple academic audiences.

Ethnographic method also provides much greater respect for and power to one's research participants, who, in some senses, become collaborators in the research . . . Qualitative research yields the benefits of deeper insights and richer analysis than quantitative through articulating what Clifford Geertz calls "thick description" and "webs of significance" and "structures of meaning" (p. 66).

Having discovered densely clustered "webs of significance" during the mapping of data about students' learning experiences in women's studies, I found Graybill's work to be an effective example of the use of narrative in drawing out convergent structures of meaning. Her work persuaded me that a narrative re/representation of student experience is both an ethical approach to collaborating with student research informants, and a contribution to contemporary conversations about teaching and learning in higher education. Although student voices are too frequently obscured, and/or under-represented in academic conversations about learning, the stories narrated in this dissertation demonstrate that their transactional experiences with one another as knowledgeable peers are significantly consequential not only to them, but more broadly to research about teaching and learning both in and beyond the field of women's studies.

Framework: Deploying Crystallization in Writing Qualitative Research

The need to dazzle gradually – that is, to reveal knowledge as fragmentary, contingent, and irreducibly complex – manifests as a guideline for understanding and practicing crystallization.

— Laura Ellingson (2009, p. 30)

Having gathered many stories collectively narrating a diversity of knowledge-making processes and experiential transactions among students enrolled in women's studies courses, I turned to Laura L. Ellingson's work (2009) theorizing the use of *crystallization* in qualitative research in order to frame their re/representation in this dissertation. As posited by Ellingson, crystallized methods of writing provide a prismatic presentation lens that works to reflectively illuminate the critiques of power central to the agenda of qualitative research.²⁹ It does so by (a) de-centering authorial voice, (b) making visible the partiality of individual stories, and (c) underscoring the embodied materiality of the experiences out of which they emerge.³⁰ It thus actively invites multiple audiences (through many possible points of entry) into the work in order to engage its dazzling array of interwoven narratives.³¹

Approaching the presentation of data through these writing strategies enabled me to create a crystallized and multi-genre format flexible enough to accommodate the polyphony of informant voice. Through the process of blending distinctive writing genres (thus "*blurring the boundaries*" of academic writing), I've simultaneously captured the complexity of learners' experiences while explicitly acknowledging my own constructive presence in the process of quilting them together. Through deploying a crystallized writing strategy privileging multiple accounts of classroom learners, this document also enables new understandings with respect to the materiality of their collaborative and collective knowledge-making transactions. As well, it allows the reader to draw their own conclusions about participant engagement in, and ownership of knowledge-making endeavors more directly than would a

document in which mine was the single voice. My anticipation in constructing a crystallized document is that the reader will discover engaging and generous modes of access to findings that augment existing funds of knowledge about the experiences of university learners, even as they also critically challenge unexamined assumptions underlying hierarchically oppressive accounts of knowing, too often present in contemporary academic discourse, about teaching and learning in higher education.

Framework: Multi-Genre Modalities for Writing Stories

Offering multiple ways of knowing and making sense of data, crystallized writing achieves depth through the combination of details and genres. The principle of the prism subverts deconstruction's dilemma of offering only critique but no solutions to workings of power in society.

— Laura Ellingson (2009, p. 10)

The genres I have utilized in creating this crystallized dissertation document have been selected to call attention to the diversity of participant voice and the modalities of learning experience present in the data. These genres include narrative excerpts of participant voice, textbox commentary, auto-ethnographic vignettes, and a range of summarizing figures, tables, and graphs. Figure 5, below, indicates my rationale and methods of deployment for each of the genres I have selected for writing student data into the dissertation. I have identified these writing/presentation modes from among a much broader spectrum of genres described by Ellingson in her *Qualitative Continuum* (2009, see Figure 1.1, p. 8.). It is my hope that readers will discover these writing genres to individually and to collectively enhance their opportunities to engage stories of learner experience in different modes and from multiple perspectives. Genres used in the dissertation are selected from each of the

three spectrums of the qualitative continuum identified by Ellingson:

Art/Impressionist, Middle-Ground, and Science/Realist.

Writing Genres Selected from Ellingson’s <i>Qualitative Continuum</i>			
	Art / Impressionist	Middle-Ground	Science / Realist
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the specific 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construct situated knowledges • Generate description 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generalize to a larger population
Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is unique in the experience of participants? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do participants understand / co-construct the situation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the relationships among situational factors?
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autoethnography • Participant observation • Interactive interviewing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups • Ethnography • Narrative analysis • Grounded theory – situational analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sampling • Coding • Surveys • Mapping
Writing Vocabularies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First person voice • Stories • Multivocal, multigenre texts • Personal reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Snippets” of participant’s words • Implied partiality and positionality • Emergent process • Thick description 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning summarized in tables and charts
Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inductive inquiry into learning processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants are main focus but researcher positionality and reflexivity evidenced • Meaning jointly constructed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounting for multiple variables • Comparative analysis

Figure 5: Using Crystallization to Incorporate Informant Data

The *impressionistic* modalities that I have selected, such as storytelling, reflect my inductive research processes. They have enabled me to layer evocatively the specificities of participant experience so that the reader can experience them individually, and in contrast to one another. However, my aim to be reflexive as well as reflective has required me to deploy research strategies from the *middle-ground* of the continuum alongside these impressionistic modes. Using ethnographic genres from the *middle-ground* has assisted me to robustly situate informants' data with/in the situations of action constituting the two research venues. Finally, in seeking to compare and contrast data collected from each of the research venues, and in order to analyze how findings from research participants might be generalizable to a larger population of university learners, I have also drawn on genres from the *science* spectrum of the continuum. Procedures such as coding, sampling, and the construction of figures and graphs, have permitted me to summarize and illustrate significant positional perspectives present in the data. I anticipate that these crystallized writing genres will enable readers to more readily identify and evaluate the significance of situational elements present in students' experiences of knowledge-making in women's studies courses as they are strongly consistent and/or widely divergent across data sets.

Framework: Centering Students' Narrative Voice

With women living with HIV/AIDS, I first began to learn about getting lost in terms of what it means to not be in control and to try to figure out a life, given that. Perhaps more precisely, I learned about getting lost from trying to simultaneously produce and theorize a book about these women . . . The book is laid out so that, rather than only "giving voice" to the stories of others, this is also a book about

researchers both getting out of the way and getting in the way. Our primary interest is in a more interactive way of doing research than is usually the case where researchers are presented as disembodied, 'objective' knowers. We are very much in the book, but we have tried to put it together in such a way that our stories are situated among many voices.

— Patti Lather & Chris Smithies (1997: vii, xiv)

In placing participant voices at the center of this dissertation, I explicitly invoke Lather's notion of "research as praxis" (1986) as a conceptual approach, and I have deliberately deployed it to disrupt hierarchical patterns of situated positionality between academic researchers and student informants. In discursively foregrounding this approach, I re/represent the perspectives of the *other* as a strategic intervention into existing discursive constructions of learning that work to obscure factors of difference, and to reproduce structural inequities. This lens into students' learning experiences also underscores the complex modalities of learner engagement experienced by participants, and subsequently reported in the data. As thus constructed, the dissertation unfolds both as a narrative stitched together through my thickly interpretive re/representations of student experience, and as an ethnographically inflected portrait of the women's studies classroom as a learning community. In its diversely distinctive texturing, the dissertation reflects the multi-layered and many-faceted learning transactions at work in the women's studies classroom. It does so by centering the experiences of the 113 student research participants who, along with me, and my three collaborating colleagues in the WHWB course, collectively constituted these classroom learning communities.

Chapter Two reviews the research that assisted me to scaffold the theoretical framework supporting this descriptively interpretive re/representation of participant data. Their texts, as reproduced in Chapters Three through Six, contribute substantively to a deepened understanding of knowledge-making processes in higher education, and suggest important avenues of future consideration for scholar-educators as well as for administrative decision makers across the disciplines.

Endnotes

¹ Although it is not a customary practice, where possible throughout this dissertation I am intentionally using first and last names for in-text author citations. Women scholars have authored the majority of the work I cite; the use of last names only (or first name initials with last name) fails to adequately recognize this in citing their scholarly contributions to discourse.

² Although my research coincides with the moment in which a discursive shift in institutional discourse has chosen to emphasize a more quantitative approach to measuring learning outcomes, I am not intentionally constructing a document that “speaks back” to this discourse. Nonetheless, my qualitative engagement with empirical data from student learners in this dissertation does provide narratives about knowledge-making processes in university classrooms that are other to and alternative to those dominant conversations. Crystallized narratives illustrate students to be deeply invested in *processes* of knowledge-making (as opposed to product acquisition). While their voices are diverse, the stories collectively re/represented in this dissertation contest notions that quantitative measures alone, such as those in which universities are investing scarce resources, are appropriately theorized and designed to be of significant utility in the continued development and support of meaningful practices for classroom teaching and learning.

³ The experience of being troubled by a sense of *missed opportunity* in the classroom actually began even earlier; I first recall experiencing this while working as a graduate teaching assistant in a large Art History survey course in 1997-1998. In retrospect, my desire to find a teaching style that might resolve these concerns was a significant factor in my decision to pursue a Women’s Studies Ph.D.

⁴ Addams (1902) noted that she was often prompted to undertake research inquiry as a result of discomfiting classroom observations and experiences.

⁵ Baxter Magolda (2004, p. xvii) notes, “While autonomy involves taking responsibility for one’s own learning and constructing, testing, confirming, and rejecting beliefs, values, and personal and social commitments, learning is also a shared experience—mutually constructed with others.”

⁶ In choosing to quote Cannon and Newble, Susan Lea, *et al.*, (2003, p. 321) elaborate a comprehensive description of student-centered learning (SCL) as “ways of thinking and learning that emphasize student responsibility and activity in learning rather than

what teachers are doing. Essentially SCL has student responsibility and activity at its heart, in contrast to a strong emphasis on teacher control and coverage of academic content in much conventional didactic teaching.”

⁷ As part of the Women’s Studies Ph.D. program at the University of Maryland, teaching graduate students are permitted, with appropriate training and supervision, to design their own sections of the courses for which they are the instructors. Approximately 25 students were enrolled in each of these sections.

⁸ University of Maryland online course catalog: <http://www.umd.edu/catalog/index.cfm/show/content.chapter/c/50>.

⁹ Clarke (2005, p. 34) writes, “By re-representation, I mean to successfully represent in another medium – such as oral interview into scholarly writing.”

¹⁰ A multi-year grant from the Ford Foundation to internationalize university teaching and learning allowed the University of Maryland’s Curriculum Transformation Project to bring together approximately 30 feminist academics from universities in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East, and North America.

¹¹ Collaborating academics designing the course and participating in the initial pilot module (2004-2005) included myself, Dr. Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo (Makerere University, Uganda), Dr. Vivienne Bozalek (University of the Western Cape, South Africa), Dr. Rivka Tuval-Mashiach (Bar-Ilan University, Israel), and Dr. Yasmeen Yusuf-Khalil (University of the West Indies, Jamaica). Unfortunately, local funding issues prevented Dr. Yusuf-Khalil and her students from participating in the 2007 course.

¹² This dissertation research was conducted under the auspices of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Maryland. IRB protocols stipulate the collection of consent forms signed voluntarily by student research participants prior to data-gathering activities. Additionally, IRB authorization permitted the convening of focus groups with students upon the completion of their course experiences. Original documents in possession of the author; copy of IRB application reproduced in the appendices.

¹³ Sample syllabi are located on the author’s dissertation wiki (see appendices); complete syllabi and archives of all student work are in possession of the author.

¹⁴ These collaborations are further described under resource links on the author's dissertation wiki (see appendices).

¹⁵ See University of Maryland websites for more information about these centers – Consortium for Race, Gender and Ethnicity: <http://www.crge.umd.edu/>; Center for Teaching Excellence: <http://www.cte.umd.edu/>; Curriculum Transformation Project: <http://www.ctp.umd.edu/>; and the Office of Human Relations Programs (Intergroup Dialogue): <http://www.ohrp.umd.edu/WE/>.

¹⁶ Web sites associated with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) that have proved fruitful: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Learning: <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/>, and The International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: <http://www.issotl.org/>.

¹⁷ Knowledge-making has functioned as the *boundary object* facilitating movement among these distinct disciplinary and extra-disciplinary communities. Bowker and Star (1999) write, “Boundary objects are those objects that both inhabit several communities of practice and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them. Boundary objects are thus both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites . . . Such objects have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation. The creation and management of boundary objects is a key process in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting communities (p. 297).”

¹⁸ In discussing these qualitative methodologies, Wolff particularly underscores “the embodied subjectivity that is the epistemological contribution of women researchers.”

¹⁹ Similar views are echoed by Patti Lather (1996).

²⁰ Clarke (2005, p. xxxxi) notes the following: “Very briefly, grounded theory is an empirical approach to the study of social life through qualitative research and analysis.”

²¹ Clarke (2005, p. xxii) first describes the three types of maps and their distinct cartographic approaches in the introduction. See also pages 86-90 and page 187 for descriptions of situational maps. My own situational maps for each of the two research venues are located in the appendices.

²² Citing Fosket (2002), Clarke (2005, p. xxiii) writes, “The outcomes of situational mappings should be ‘thick analyses’, paralleling Geertz’s ‘thick descriptions’. Thick analyses take explicitly into account the full array of elements in the situation and explicate their interrelations.”

²³ Clarke (2005, p. 48) asserts, “Through understanding the discursive constructions of implicated actors and actants, analysts can grasp a lot about the social worlds in which they are active and some of the consequences of those actions for the less powerful.”

²⁴ Behar’s emphasis on using personal voice in academic writing is also very present through her website: <http://www.ruthbehar.com>.

²⁵ Like Behar, I attribute my interest in pluralizing voice and democratizing my presentation of research findings to my positionality as a female scholar with socio-cultural identities that are significantly ‘other’ to the predominantly white and masculine norms by which power and authority are exercised in the academy.

²⁶ Arguing that research has the potential to be activist and emancipatory, Lather (1998) writes that in order to do so, one must “involve the researched in a democratized process of inquiry characterized by negotiation, reciprocity, and empowerment.”

²⁷ As evidenced in this dissertation, research with informants has similarly revealed experiences of silencing when structural hierarchies in the academy obscure the differential lines of access to institutional authority that exist in classrooms between instructors and their students.

²⁸ In the preface to *Troubling the Angels*, Lather & Smithies (1997) state, “This is not, perhaps, the book that any of the women would write, but it is an effort to include many voices and to offer various levels of knowing and thinking through which a reader can make their own sense. Challenging any easy reading via shifting styles, the book positions the reader as thinker, willing to trouble the easily understood and the taken-for-granted. It is our hope that the combination of all this will work in ways we cannot even anticipate.”

²⁹ In her preface Ellingson (2009) notes, “Crystallization is a methodological framework for bringing together not just different forms of data and analysis (as in multi-method research) but also different genres and forms of sense making within interpretative methodology. Grounded in Laurel Richardson’s (1994/2000) notion of

the crystallized self, qualitative crystallization is as a postmodern reimagining of traditional triangulation ‘as a messy, multi-genre, paradigm-spanning approach to resisting the art/science dichotomy. Unlike triangulations, crystallization does not seek a more definitive truth. Rather it problematizes the multiple truths it represents.’”

³⁰ Ellingson (2009, p. 34) explains, “Crystallization takes a holistic view of knowledge production as always a mind/body/spirit enterprise, reflecting a grounding of knowledge production in the body, not as in the mind/body split of Cartesian dualism. It troubles many such distinctions. I encourage readers to think of crystallization as always already embodied, resisting the disembodied voice that characterizes traditional academic prose.”

³¹ Ellingson (2009, p. 58) remind us that, “Readers participate actively in sense making construction and application of our work— our goal in crystallization should be to accommodate many possible points of entry.”

Chapter Two: Experiential Learning – Theorizing the Interpretive Framework

Teaching is a performative act. And it is that aspect of our work that offers the space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each classroom. To embrace the performative aspect of teaching we are compelled to engage “audience,” to consider issues of reciprocity. Teachers are not performers in the traditional sense of the word in that our work is not meant to be a spectacle. Yet it is meant to serve as a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning.

— bell hooks (1994, p. 11)

Introduction

As noted in Chapter One, this research project originated out of the “felt” dissatisfaction I experienced as a graduate student instructor at the University of Maryland. I was particularly discomfited by my perception that many of the students in my women’s studies courses were not experiencing the types of transformative learning transactions theorized by hooks, and by other feminist pedagogues.¹ In reconceptualizing my teaching praxis, I envisioned the classroom as a feminist learning community – as a space in which collaborative knowledge-making could facilitate transformative learning. I hoped that a feminist pedagogics of community, together with a dialogic approach to discussion, and a constructivist orientation to the deployment of digital technologies would prompt students to engage one another more effectively as knowledgeable peers, and as learning partners, as they explored course themes.

Although my close participant observation, as well initial feedback from students about their experiences as learners appeared positive, I was reluctant to make assumptions about this shift in classroom teaching without a closer analysis of students' work as they collectively engaged in knowledge-making transactions.² I therefore invited students to participate as research informants. I hoped that empirical data might substantiate my anecdotal observations about their deepened processes of learner engagement, and I anticipated that by constructing a document interpretively narrating the experiences of students, who are key (if under-represented) stakeholders, my research would contribute new knowledges to academic discourse about teaching and learning in higher education. The resulting dissertation is a crystallized narrative that reflectively illuminates the diversely varied and multi-sensory transactions through which learners engaged in meaning-making with one another in the women's studies classroom.

Theorizing Interpretative Frameworks: Contributing Literatures

Chapter Two situates this dissertation inquiry with/in the context of two simultaneously occurring learning experiences, both of which were reciprocally iterative in nature. The first was my experience as a teacher seeking to theorize and to implement a student-centered framework for classroom learning. The second was my experience as a researcher working to construct an interpretive structure by which to share students' stories of learning from the two courses that served as the research venues. As I experienced a deepening investment in both of these commitments, I found that I was no longer discomfited by my experiences of classroom teaching.

Rather, I was motivated by what I was learning from my inductive processes of research inquiry with student informants, and eager to share what I had learned from them about their processes of classroom learning.

In theorizing an interpretative framework that would support a centering of student knowledge-making experiences, I have negotiated across the bounded territories of many disciplinary and extra-disciplinary locations. As illustrated in figure 6, below, critical scholarship about knowledge-making produced at the intersections, and in the interstices of Art History, Education and Women’s Studies has supported my project to theorize a framework for the interpretive re/representation students’ experiences of classroom learning.

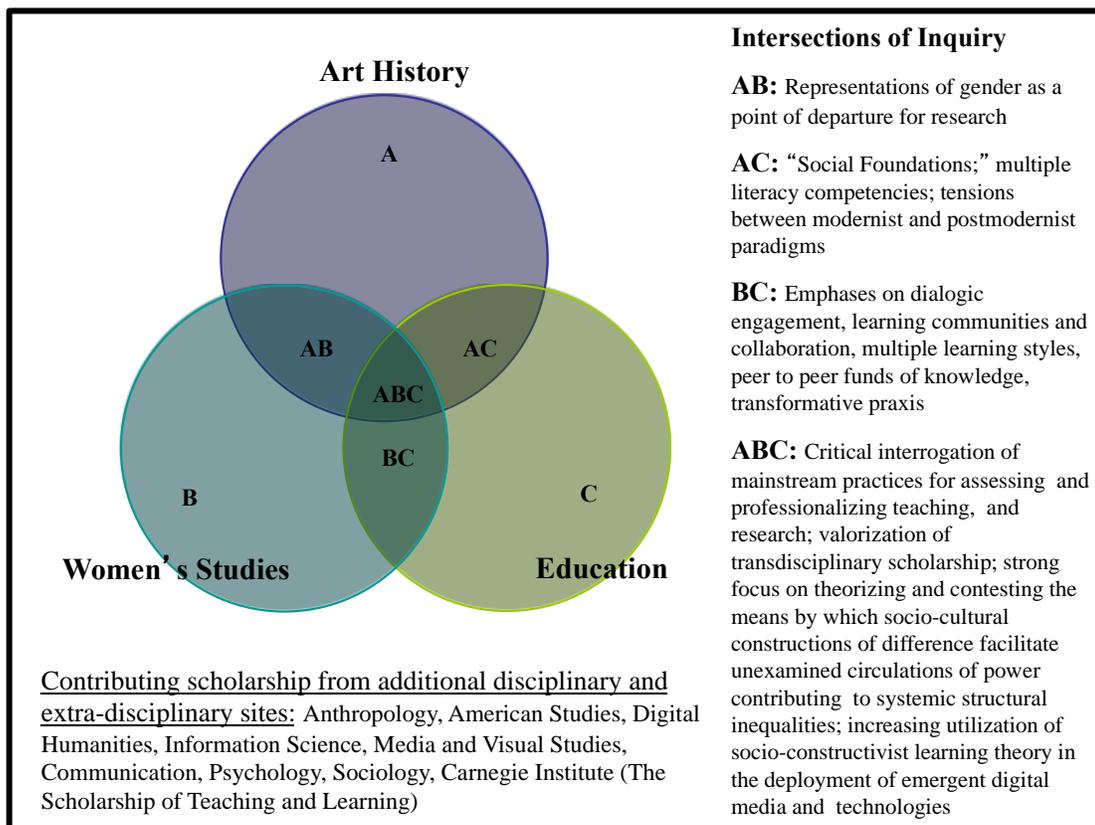


Figure 6: Dissertation Research: Transdisciplinary Intersections

The interdisciplinary premise of women's studies, and its ongoing commitment to social justice coalition-building across boundaries, has been instrumental to my ability to bring these disciplinary-crossing discourses together in my teaching, and in my dissertation research (Klein, 1996). As Katie King (1994, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2012) has persuasively argued, the objective in conducting this type of strategic work is to build flexible crossings between and among transdisciplinary knowledge communities. In describing the processes of flexible knowledge making as the "taken-for-granted" aspect of conducting interdisciplinary research, and recognizing the considerable challenges it poses, King (2004) writes:

And flexible knowledges could also name the processes of movement across communities of practice, indeed sometimes are the products of such processes. Those of us now immersed, perhaps drowning, in flexible knowledges are paradoxically both *willing and required* to become beginners, over and over, to give up mastery and to open up to risk, connection, and even enthusiasm. I have come to prefer this inevitably already dated term "flexible knowledges" to "interdisciplinarity" in the timescale realized under academic capitalism's colonization of more and more universities as sites of knowledge production, and as universities become less and less "the most valued centers making knowledge."³

In discursively mapping knowledge-making as a boundary object across disciplinary boundaries, I have achieved sharpened resonances about these complex processes. These resonances have facilitated my project to unpack processes of classroom learning, and have enabled me to theorize a praxis through which students may be prompted to interrogate assumptions about knowledge hegemonies as fixed, neutral, objective, or as the privileged province of any particular cultural group or social institution (David Trend, 1992).⁴ This chapter examines the ways in which

transdisciplinary research has deepened my understanding of, and engagement with, classroom learning as situated transactional processes. Border-crossing scholarship described below has assisted my sense-making processes of engaging the data contributed by women's studies students, and my theorizing the interpretative scaffold by which to share the stories they voice. Participant texts are rich in details illuminating the multi-faceted complexities of *being* a learner and of *doing* learning as they have engaged one another in their collaborative knowledge-making endeavors; their narrative voices poignantly illuminate their continuously transactional cycle of perceiving and processing.

In analyzing students' learning transactions and their reflections upon these processes, I have excavated their embrace of shared and collaborative knowledge-making endeavors. These processes have led, as Ella Shohat (2001, p. 2) writes, to an "understanding not only of how power is wielded in a given society but also that everyone is subject to its hierarchies, and in turn to the ability to reimagine a shared polyphonic space of community affiliations and cultural practices." As the reader will note, participant narratives are firmly grounded in learners' lived experiences, tellingly illustrating their frequently painful coming to grips with issues of difference, and of having experienced other voices privileged above their own in processes of elaborating knowledge. Not inconsequentially, in writing this dissertation, I have recognized that my processes of being a novice learner in and across multiple terrains of knowledge have been strikingly similar to the kinds of transactions reported in the data by

students as they collaborated together in women's studies courses across the diversity of their lived experiences and disciplinary training.

Inquiry: On Being a Knower – The Praxis of Experiential Learning

Vignette: Who's Dewey?

September 2004, University of Maryland, College Park campus

I'm standing in line at the pre-meeting lunch buffet in the Maryland room at Marie Mount Hall; lunch on laps will be accompanied by a presentation sponsored by the Center for Teaching Excellence. I spot Eden Segal to whom I have been recently introduced at an event sponsored by the Consortium for Race, Gender and Ethnicity. Eden is a graduate student in Educational Policy and Leadership Development; she is also co-teaching a course on Student Service Learning with one of my professors in American Studies. As I'm just beginning to recognize the need for some educational theory to ground my teaching pedagogy, and Eden seems to be both friendly and savvy, I decide to query her for some pointers. Trouble is I'm not even sure what to ask. I haven't had any courses in teaching in higher education, and I feel like I don't know the terrain. However, Eden responds warmly, giving me the names of professors in the College of Education with whom she thinks I should take classes. I also ask where she thinks I should start to get up to speed in my independent reading. "Dewey," she replies.

"Dewey?" I repeat blankly. Perhaps I didn't clearly explain that I am interested in contemporary scholarship and innovative teaching practices. Smiling perfunctorily, I try to be diplomatic. "But," I probe, "Isn't he a little passé by now?"

"Passé?" Eden gives me a level look. "Absolutely not!" she says emphatically. "Start with Dewey," she insists. "You've got to start there. All of your questions go back to Dewey."

Segal's advice was exactly on target. Educational philosopher John Dewey's observational work enabled him to theorize learning as a continuous set of material transactions. These transactions actively demand, and simultaneously engage ontological and epistemological modes of experience. In theorizing learning as a series

of processes that are *actively* transactional, John Dewey (1916) explicitly construes knowledge-making as continuous sense-making negotiations occurring within the boundaries of and through one's lived experience and environmental situated-ness. His pragmatically-inflected synthesis of learning as transactions that take place between the individual and her/his environment is grounded in painstakingly careful observation and reflection carried out with his colleagues, including women contemporaries such as progressive educators Jane Addams, Alice Chipman, Elsie Ripley Clapp, Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Ella Flagg Young, all at the University of Chicago's Laboratory School (1894-1904). In his writing, Dewey urges educators to facilitate "intelligently transacted reflective inquiry" by validating the past experiences of learners, and by acknowledging their potential to be actively engaged subjects, capable of authoring new knowledge.

While stressing reflection as a significant knowledge-making transaction, Dewey's wide-reaching theory of learning posits *knowing* as a set of processes necessarily conditional upon a broad integration of ontological and epistemological modes of experience. Arguing that "we cannot talk about reality without accounting for our presence in it," Dewey (1938) argues for the need to be attentive to all of the transactions that together constitute knowing. His work transgressively disrupts binary hierarchies that construct transactional experiences of knowing, such as the practical, the ethical, the aesthetic, and the religious as *felt* experiences "in opposition to" a rational mode of *cognitive* processing.⁵ Rather, Dewey theorizes a complexly interactive and dynamic interplay of multiple transactional modes by and through

which humans adaptively negotiate in sense-making experiences of/with/through their environment.⁶

Critical and feminist educators have built on Dewey's thesis of learning as continuously transactional and multi-modal to theorize the utility of social pedagogies in the process of co-constructing new knowledges (Randy Bass & Heidi Elmendorf, (2011); Leanna Marie Eaton (2001); Elizabeth Doyle McCarthy (1996). Feminist pedagogues, applying Dewey's pragmatic description of the multiple experiential modes through which individuals transact meaning-making, have explicitly theorized the transformative possibilities of collaborative modes of experience to the project of negotiating social constructs of difference (Charlene Haddock Seigfried, 1996, 2001, 2002).⁷ And in writing about the ongoing relevance of Dewey's work – in ways that resonate acutely with the data collected from research informants for this dissertation project – Michael Glassman (2001) asserts:

The ways in which we make sense of our worlds cannot be separated from the context in which we operate; context always matters . . . By acknowledging, even highlighting the diversity of experiences and perspectives that students bring to our classes, students are able to see themselves in the context of social views different from theirs, and thus they are able to reconstruct themselves in the face of a troubled society. (p.14)

In bringing together these transdisciplinary conversations around Dewey's work, I have re-conceptualized the university classroom as a space in which the entire range of student funds of knowledge and experience are vital resources for all learners (Gert Biesta & Nicholas C. Burbules, 2003).⁸

Inquiry: What Are the Material Bases of Knowledge-Making?

Two questions posed by feminist sociologist Susan Leigh Star (1995) have also proved germane to the construction of a theoretical framework by which to unpack and to illuminate learning transactions captured in empirical data. In asking, “Who owns the means of knowledge production?” and “What is the material basis for practice?” Star’s work has focused my analysis on the *materiality* of knowledge-making processes with which informant narratives are richly infused. The rest of this chapter describes the frameworks that have enabled my construction of a theoretical scaffold to illuminate the materiality of knowledge-making transactions in the research venues. These frameworks include (a) socio-constructivist learning theory, (b) new media technologies, (c) participatory dialogue, (d) the feminist pedagogics of classroom learning communities, (d) the production of culture, and (e) the sharing of stories across difference.

Framework: Socio-Constructivist Learning Theory

Building on Dewey’s observations that learners construct knowledge in and through their transactional experiences, and drawing on one another’s work, psychologists Jean Piaget (1954, 1970, 1972, 2000) and Lev Vygotsky (1987) elaborated richly theorized descriptions of children engaged in social learning. Their work proved instrumental to the development of constructivist learning theories. At the most elemental level, these theories assert that learning is accomplished in/by doing; thus they are fundamentally material in their approach to knowledge-making (Dan W. Butin (2005); Bruno La Tour (2003). Theorists advocating the significance of

peer-to-peer learning collaborations in the field of higher education have drawn on constructivism to produce pedagogies of social learning by doing together. Their work has proved instrumental both in my course design decisions and in my collection and analysis of participant data from the courses serving as research venues (Thomas A. Angelo & K. Patricia Cross (1993); Robert B. Barr & John Tagg (1995); Randy Bass (1999, 2007, 2009); Pat Hutchings & Allen Wutzdorff (1988); Pat Hutchings (2005); Yvonne Hillier (2005); Ian Bryant Usher & Rennie Johnston (1997); Susan J. Lea, David Stephenson, & Juliette Troy (2000); and Lee S. Shulman (2004).

As documented in texts re/produced in subsequent chapters, informants offered perceptive insights about their learning experiences in a collaborative, socio-constructivist classroom environment. Their narratives are replete with useful critiques about the challenges and demands of working collaboratively. They note the challenges posed by this collaborative labor to the extent that it was outside the parameters of their typical university course experiences. These critiques notwithstanding, learners also reflect persuasively on the degree to which they found collaborative processes of doing the work of knowledge-making to be both emancipatory and empowering. Above all, their narratives explicitly acknowledge the ways in which their technology-enabled collaborative transactions, and their participation in dialogue, were materially significant elements of their knowledge-making processes.

Framework: Material Bases of Knowledge-Making – Social(ly) Media/ed Technologies

The methodology of the course was really innovative and novel in that it emphasized gender theory and feminist ideologies that address issues of women's well-being through an interactive online atmosphere. One of the most unique aspects of this course was that we were given the opportunity to gain an international perspective from our group members. This integration of viewpoints allowed a comprehensive analysis of the topic in relation to the challenges that women face in other countries. This level of integration would not have been possible in any other course format. The increased interaction that resulted promoted responsiveness amongst my group members because comments and feedback were immediately available through the e-learning website.

— Student, *Women's Health and Well-Being* (2007)

In retrospect, my decision to make extensive use of the most readily available social and new media digital technologies was particularly opportune. Given the ever-increasing possibilities for learners to be hyper-connected to information sources both in and outside of the classroom environment, I wondered if educative appropriations of these technologies might benefit processes of peer learning collaborations. In shaping technology-mediated learning opportunities, I assumed that technologies are in and of themselves content-neutral, and that it would be critical to align their use with my pedagogical goal of facilitating transformative knowledge-making transactions (Yasmeen Yusuf-Khalil, Vivienne Bozalek, Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, Rivka Tuval-Mashiach, & Kimberlee Staking, 2007).

Technologies deployed in the courses that served as research venues were selected with the anticipation that they would prompt learners in constructing materially consequential transactional knowledge-making opportunities. I further anticipated that as participants were prompted to interact with one another in these

particular technology-configured calibrations, they would develop and hone capabilities, permitting them to critically engage issues of women's cultural production (in the WAC course) and women's health and well-being (in the WHWB course). Equally I hoped that as students jointly engaged with technologies in completing course assignments (e.g. technology-facilitated conversations in the classroom, online discussions, reflective journaling, and digital group knowledge projects), they would experience deepened transactions with one another as knowledgeable peers.⁹ Findings, reported in subsequent chapters, indicate that research informants did experience technology-enabled transactions to be strongly significant to their abilities to actively and materially engage one another as collaborative knowledge-making partners in women's studies classrooms.

Framework: Material Bases of Knowledge-Making – Participatory Dialogue

The entire class environment made it easier for us to share our opinions. It helped me build my perspective in other things – it was easy to voice our perspective and also to hear other people's opinions in our discussions . . . you would share your opinion and then somebody else would share their opinion and then it would make you think about yours and I think that is really important.

— Student, *Women, Art and Culture* (2006)

In a traditional classroom situation one tends not to be so challenging if one does not agree with a fellow student's standpoints and in most circumstances there is not enough time to offer your opinion on a matter you did not agree with because of lecture time constraints. I found that one can challenge and clear up issues one has with fellow students much more easily in discussion forums.

— Student, *Women's Health and Well-Being* (2007)

Classroom learning communities, however democratically envisioned, are composed of individual stakeholders whose differential access to power may hinder or

heighten their ability to participate as peers in emancipatory knowledge-making practices. Participatory dialogue seeks to assist individuals to suspend judgment as they listen to, and speak with one another on controversial topics across difference, and in the process to become more cognizant of the material consequences of unequal power relationships. The goal of dialogue is to help learners collaboratively determine means of bridging difference – to theorize and to enact material practices of engagement that do not reinforce oppressive hierarchies of power. Proponents posit that dialogic engagement prompts participants to generate critically transformative understandings meaningful to both the individual and to the community (Nagda, Gurin & Lopez (2003); Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig (2002). They anticipate that participants will subsequently transfer dialogic skills of listening for understanding to sites of social negotiation and meaning-making beyond the classroom.

Educators utilizing dialogue in higher education have been strongly influenced by Paolo Freire’s theorization of *praxis* as reflective action – that is, as the set of processes that prompts learners to dialogically and reflectively engage one another as knowledgeable peers. Freire used dialogic inquiry socratically in his work with illiterate adults in Brazil as he sought to democratize learning opportunities.

Contending that such a praxis has the potential to ameliorate the more oppressive elements of traditional adult education, Freire also argued that the very materiality of its transgressive process permitted learners to engage in “social justice work for transformative human flourishing” as they were prompted to both “*reflect* and *act* upon the world.”¹⁰

Contemporary scholars critiquing the oppressive characteristics of traditional educational practices that privilege the experiences of some learners above others have expanded beyond Freire's initial focus on class privilege as the power regime perpetuating hegemonic hierarchies of difference. Their work emphasizes how other categories (such as age, ethnicity, gender, nationality, race, and sexuality) also utilize hierarchies of difference to privilege some through disempowering others.¹¹ In the past decade, critical scholars across the disciplines have theorized a range of learner-centered dialogic practices to promote more democratic and socially just classroom teaching and learning practices. Among those whose work has been of great value to my own teaching design process are Arnetha F. Ball (2006); James A. Banks (2007); Marcia B. Baxter Magolda (1999, 2000); Gert Biesta & S. Miedema (2002); Jacqueline Cossentino (2004); Antonia Darder, Rodolfo D. Torres, & Marta Baltada (2003); Geneva Gay (2000); Morgan Gardner & Ursula A. Kelly (2008); Rebecca A. Goldstein (2007); bell hooks (1994, 2000, 2003); Marvin Lynn (2002); Peter Mayo (1999); Edmund V. O'Sullivan, Amish Morrell, & Mary Ann O'Connor (2002); Elizabeth A. Pierre & Wanda S. Pillow (2000); Eugene F. Provenzo Jr. (2006); and Chela Sandoval (2000).

I first required students in the *Women, Art, and Culture* course to simultaneously enroll in a one-credit dialogue seminar following my participation in a 2003 faculty workshop about intergroup dialogue at the University of Maryland.¹² Students were, as noted in Chapters Three and Four, initially quite reluctant to participate in these dialogues. Almost without exception, however, informants

subsequently strongly endorsed their experiences in participatory intergroup dialogue as having been genuinely transformative. The work of the following scholars has proven relevant to my analysis of empirical data from students enrolled in intergroup dialogues: Megan Boler (2004); Christine Ann Geranios (1997); Sara DeTurk, 2004; Jean Lave & Etienne Wenger (1991); Jane Vella, *et al.*, (2002, 2004); Ximena Zuniga & T. D. Sevig (2000).

Inquiry: Who Owns the Means of Knowledge Production?

Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously students and teachers.

— Paolo Freire (2005, p. 72)

Critical educators working in many disciplinary fields theorize practices that call out, and seek to strategically restructure socially oppressive learning conditions. In the work of feminist pedagogues described below there is a particularly scrupulous insistence on the impossibility of social justice learning in the classroom without attention to the material practices by which adult educators prompt learners to engage in shared processes of knowledge production. These feminist educators have strongly asserted the importance of authentically articulated roles of ownership for learners in classroom knowledge-making. They have theorized learning processes that are not only more democratically collaborative in nature, but that also work to produce relations of care and respect for the *other*, whoever s/he may be. The work of the following have served as critical guideposts in my inquiry into transformative teaching practices: Gloria Anzaldúa (1990) ; Linda Briskin & Rebecca Coulter (1992); Valerie

A. Clifford (2002); Berenice Malka Fisher (2001); bell hooks (1981, 1984, 1989, 1994); Patti Lather (1997, 2000); Carmen Luke (2002); Frances A. Maher (1999); Shirley C. Parry (1999); Chela Sandoval,(2000); Carolyn Shrewsbury (1987); Joan Tronto (1993); Kathleen Weiler (1991); and Penny Welch (2004). Their work has not only supported this project to theorize and implement a peer-centered learning praxis, it has also inspired my qualitative engagement with, and interpretive re/representation of findings from student research participants.

Framework: Feminist Learning Communities – Differential Consciousness and a Hermeneutics of Love

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.

— bell hooks (1994, p. 207)

As bell hooks notes, while the possibility of socially just practices for collaborative knowledge-making exists, these demand a transgressive praxis, one that seeks to facilitate experiences in which learners are prompted to become invested in the collective process. Nurturing relationships constituted with/in empathy, equity, respect, and trust in classroom learning environments demands careful attentiveness to existing inequalities, and to hierarchical regimes of power-sustaining privilege within the academy. Given the hierarchical inequalities of many kinds inscribed in the academy, and the constructs of difference discursively supported in the broader socio-cultural context within which the academy is embedded, these types of learning

relationships are challenging to construct and fragile in their sustainability.¹³ Three feminist scholars of color, Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, and Chela Sandoval, all center these concerns in their work. Their scholarship has been critical to my attempt to theorize the classroom as a transgressive space in which more democratic and caring relationships might be constructed and nurtured. I am particularly indebted to each for their impassioned assertions underscoring the types of material labor that are demanded to theorize, and to construct learning communities in which transformations across difference are made possible through relationships of affect, honesty, reciprocity, and genuinely loving concern for the *other* as well as for the self. Their ideas have spurred me to conceptualize teaching and learning as social justice work, and to inquire into how students experienced their learning in the women's studies classrooms that served as research venues.¹⁴

In the work of each of these women is a commitment to learning communities as spaces replete with transformative knowledge-making possibilities. Community, as enacted in their work, is theorized as essential, not merely to nurture participants' growth as learners, but also as a means of empowering participants to understand themselves as change agents beyond the classroom. Transformation is understood as the material consequence of processes that facilitate participants' abilities to collectively theorize alternative cultural narratives challenging the authority of oppressive structures of inequity. Critical to these processes are transactions permitting participants to engage factors of difference through the hearing and telling of stories –

both those which participants themselves elaborate, and those that they encounter in their collective exploration of contested issues.

Hooks (1994) asserts that a transgressive learning praxis entails border crossings that utilize difference to interrogate and to challenge oppressive regimes of power:

If we really want to create a cultural climate where biases can be challenged and changed, all border crossings must be seen as valid and legitimate. This does not mean that they are not subjected to critique or critical interrogation, or that there will not be many occasions when the crossings of the powerful into the terrains of the powerless will not perpetuate existing structures. The risk is ultimately less threatening than a continued attachment to and support of existing systems of domination, particularly as they affect teaching, how we teach, and what we teach (p. 131).

Foundational to hooks's, Anzaldúa's, and Sandoval's theorizations of emancipatory teaching practices is their courageous and determined mobilization of categories of critical analysis that include love, *eros*, and trust (Sandoval, 2000, p. 111.2). As a result of my engagement with their work, I have produced the narrative of this document as an explicitly critical reflection on processes through which women's studies students were prompted to build trust with the *other* as they constructed collaborative learning partnerships across existing regimes of power marked by difference, and sustained by privilege. In my endeavors to prompt less hierarchical and more democratic classroom relationships, I hoped that peer collaborations might enable learning transactions marked by deepened understanding and respect, if not *eros* or love. As I undertook a qualitative analysis of students' empirical data, I looked to excavate evidences of processes revealing such transactions.

In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval elaborates the material praxis of *differential consciousness* as a basis for social justice action. She does so by drawing on the mobilization of collective resistance of the oppressed (2000, p. 28.9-30.1). Writing out of her perspective as a U.S. Third world feminist, Sandoval illuminates the material practices by which subordinated and marginalized others actively engage in processes that are resistant and oppositional. *Differential consciousness* names the resistant responses enacted by these *others* as they confront their lived experience of being drawn into contemporary movements of global exchange. Sandoval's project also calls attention to the materially oppressive consequences to these *others* of the unchallenged circulation of normative cultural narratives that obscure regimes of privilege and subordination sustained through local and global power hierarchies.

Although Sandoval theorizes differential consciousness as a form of resistant *cultural* praxis, she also argues for its utility as *educational* praxis. She asserts that an educational praxis of differential consciousness may enable the disruption of institutional practices within the academy that facilitate oppressive concentrations of power.¹⁵ Thus, even though her work focuses primarily on highly specific strategic modes of differential consciousness inscribed in the lives of subordinated groups resisting their experiences of physical and psychic dislocation across transnational borders, it provided me with a model for interpretively re/representing alternative processes of knowledge-making inscribed in the texts of student informants, participants who wield less power in the university setting than those who teach or

administer processes of learning in higher education. Sandoval's cautionary emphasis in writing *Methodology* (2000) was also an important aid in this project. She notes that transformative methods of resistance must be "provisional, experiential, responsive to the demands of the institution and to the needs of the participants," taking into account the contexts in which "subject and object are enmeshed" (p. 153-159).

Essential not only to Sandoval's work, but to my embrace of it is her transgressive reformulation of resistance as a "hermeneutics of love." In grounding the emancipatory potential of differential consciousness in this transactional process, Sandoval emphatically aligns this love, a boundary-crossing act of resistance, with Freirean praxis – as a process of personal and social transformation. She persuasively contends that "love reinvented in this way as a political technology, as a body of knowledges, arts, practices, and procedures crosses boundaries to become the basis for re-forming the self and the world" (p. 4). Together with boundary-crossing pedagogics of trust, elaborated by Anzaldúa, and *eros* (hooks), Sandoval's elaboration of differential consciousness provided theoretical tools useful for weighing and leveraging both the benefits and the costs of desiring and inviting students to experience the classroom community as a site of collaborative and transformative knowledge-making.

Framework: Personal Narrative – A Material Practice to Create Community

Personal testimony, personal experience, is such fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory because it usually forms the base of our theory making. I am grateful to the many women and men who dare to create theory from the location of pain and struggle, who

courageously expose wounds to give us their experience to teach and guide, as a means to chart new theoretical journeys.

— bell hooks (1994, p. 74)

A genuine sense of care in hearing the experiences of the other animates the transgressive social justice work enacted by hooks, Sandoval and Anzaldúa. Sandoval cites this aspect of hooks' work in her introduction to Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating's edited volume anthologizing narratives of otherness, *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002). In her introduction, Sandoval describes the many collaborations that supported the production of the book as examples of the materially transformative power of love imagined in this way – as both self and other-oriented.

This method vitalizes a twenty-first-century hermeneutics: “Love” understood as a mode of individual and collective social movement (hooks). This social movement spans and conveys transnational citizenry into a dissident force. The aim of this dissident force and of its methodology of love is creative renewal of the planet (p. 24).

And, in her essay closing the compilation, Anzaldúa herself reflects on the mindful effort and dedicated energy that is required in imaging and in dialogically constructing community through this type of activist praxis, writing:

This work of spiritual activism and the contract of holistic alliances allows conflict to dissolve through reflective dialogue . . . Accepting the other as an equal in a joint endeavor, you respect and are fully present for her . . . Change requires more than words on a page – it takes perseverance, creative ingenuity, and acts of love (p. 572-74).

As is made eloquently visible in many of Anzaldúa's writings (1983, 1987, 1990, 2002), an activist praxis of love and trust is a journey towards realizing a relationship of differential consciousness with the other. It is one that is grounded in the

willingness to publicly share one's own story (often painfully realized and articulated) for the purpose of empowering a space/place of transgressive communal knowledge-making.

Hooks (1994) also theorizes the deployment of personal narrative as a materially significant basis by which to activate relationships of love (*eros*) among learners in the "space of a democratically yearning classroom." In *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), she illuminates the crucial power of a democratically unfolding pedagogy of personal narrative as a means of creating a community capable of *eros*. She assertively notes that through a striving for *eros*, the sharing of such narratives refashions the classroom as a space in which learners both validate and are validated by one another in the work of social justice transformation:

If experience is already invoked in the classroom as a way of knowing that coexists in a nonhierarchical way with other ways of knowing, then it lessens the possibility that it can be used to silence. Our collective listening to one another affirms the value and uniqueness of each voice (p. 84).

Cultural critic Pepi Leistyna (1995) points to the courage demonstrated by hooks as she works to reach across borders of difference, always affirming the universal value of this powerful and transgressive praxis. Leistyna points to hooks as a personal as well as a scholarly model, writing "in the face of obstacles, hooks demands that all of us, regardless of our location, engage in serious debate and struggle, to work together to eradicate domination at its very core" (p. 322).

Through integrating narratives of personal risk-taking into her academic writing, hooks' work continually challenges the oppressively silencing assumption that

individuals and groups are unable to work together across difference in this process. She thus (1989) bears witness to the potential of shared stories to engage participants in acts of social justice that challenge hierarchies of oppression.

...moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of “talking back,” that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice (p.8).

As a cautionary note, however, hooks (1994), also asserts that such an emancipatory praxis “is risky, demanding, and topples hierarchical arrangements in the classroom to which many teachers may be wedded” (p. 133).

I anticipated that in yielding some of the authoritative presence of the classroom, I would provide an enlarged space for students to collaboratively experience *story* – their own and others – through a reflexive praxis that encouraged open, caring, careful, and democratically envisioned processes of exploration and critique. It was my hope that this would permit participants, through struggle, and across difference, to engage one another as potential allies and learning peers. I further anticipated that as classroom learners collectively experienced the power of personal story, the multi-sensorial quality of their transactions would assist them to comprehend, and to challenge the differential access to power that is sustained by hegemonic constructs of difference. Students’ experiences of *story* in the women’s studies classroom, as re/represented through their texts in Chapters Three through Six, exhibit knowledge-making processes that are strongly marked with these material

traces, and that are characterized by deepened and reciprocal understandings of self – and other – awareness.

In September 2007, as I was puzzling how I might most effectively re/represent these transgressively felt narratives, the Department of Women’s Studies sponsored Rhodessa Jones as an Artist-in-Residence at The University of Maryland. Jones is the co-artistic director of *Cultural Odyssey*, a performance company with a social justice mission. She is also the founding director of *The Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women*. I was fortunate to participate in the special topics seminar, *Art as Social Change, Creative Performance and Creative Survival* that she co-taught with Professor Elsa Barkeley-Brown during her artist-in-residency. Participants, including myself, collaboratively designed performance exercises which we then implemented in movement and writing workshops with residents at the Thomas J. S. Waxter Detention Center for minor girls in nearby Laurel, Maryland. As I participated in this seminar, viscerally experiencing and participating in the power of Jones’ work at close quarters, I recognized how vital it was for me to construct a document in which readers were themselves empowered to personally experience the stories of student research informants collected from the research venues for this dissertation. The following vignette briefly re/represents the transformative power of shared story-making as I experienced it together with other seminar participants within the radically social justice space of our “democratically yearning” learning community. It gestures to the imperative I responded to in constructing a document that prompts readers to experience what learners experienced through the traces of the stories they produced.

Vignette: ‘We Just Tellin’ Stories’

September, 2007

At our first meeting Jones defined art as social change. She continually challenged us to see art as shared participation in stories that empower.

“Art can help us let the anger and the trauma out. It isn’t healthy or right to keep it bottled inside – it destroys lives like the burning hot flame of a fire. But if art can help us to let it go...to not hold it in any longer then I believe. I believe in mythology. We all have powerful stories we need to share with our clan.”

At the conclusion of our month-long series of workshops with the young women incarcerated at the Waxter Center, seminar participants collectively wrote, and choreographed, the following tone-poem. It is a reflective movement exercise that celebrates the public sharing of personal experience as art and as learning; as such it represents creative survival in the face of trauma.

Creative Performance, Creative Survival

Transform my anger into theatre,
Transform my silence into an audience.
If everyone were listening I would say,
I am fighting not to hurt you but to stay alive.
But will someone actually listen to my story?
Is my struggle actually worth a damn?
I find sustenance in my silenced rage,
But my silence will not protect me.
It is life or death and in telling my story
I heal:
Being in touch with our bodies can deceive us.
I struggle with the memory of violence and betrayal
And being in touch with my body.
Honestly, I have struggled and struggled,
And if everyone were listening I would say I am tired of this shit,
Because she tipped on the runway of clubs she could not get into
And I dug my jack in clubs but never outside.
Honestly, it’s the fight in me that keeps me on this earth,
Our connections with people are what bring purpose.
I need some movement to survive.

My participatory knowledge-making transactions in this seminar were electrifyingly multi-sensory; beyond the classroom they also assisted me in theorizing two interpretative frameworks by which to situate texts from informants within the dissertation. The first framework unpacks the role of *story* in the production of cultural knowledge, and the second explores the power of shared stories to make tangibly visible power differentials that affect meaningful participation in knowledge-making.

Framework: Producing Stories, Producing Culture

Rhodessa Jones (2001, 2012) and others, including critical educators Henry Giroux (1992, 1993, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2011, 2012), and David Trend (1992, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2008), have theorized the role of *story* as a crucial element in the production of cultural knowledge. In positing that culture is the accumulative articulation of our stories, Trend (1992) calls attention to the ways in which stories provide a conduit for the circulation of power and privilege. Pointing out their potential to enable, and/or to re/produce hegemonic socio-cultural constructs of difference, he notes:

If culture is the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, it is useful to realize that such stories are never neutral but are always constructed, delivered, and received in specific historical encounters. For this reason they are political by definition (p. 2).

However, in conceptualizing stories as the material out of which the cultural fabric is woven, Trend also theorizes an explicitly *narrative* approach to critiquing the inequities these processes enable and sustain. Arguing for a cultural pedagogy that will make visible for reflective critique the set of processes at work in the production of story, he writes:

A pedagogy of culture entails analyzing these stories, their tellers and their times – and encouraging this analytic spirit in others . . . As a cultural practice, pedagogy both contests and refigures the construction, presentation, and engagement of various forms of images, text, talk and action which results in the production of meaning, through which students construct their individual and collective future. Pedagogy in this sense represents both a discourse of critique and a project of possibility. As a form of cultural production, pedagogy is implicated in the construction and organization of knowledge, desires, values and social practices (p. x).

Trend asserts that in the process of critically engaging stories, we disrupt their unexamined conduits of circulation, opening a space of awareness. He argues that through participation in story-making, we can collectively unpack stories reproducing difference. Moreover, in narrating our diverse experiences, we can weave a different cultural fabric, one that is less likely to produce oppressive constructions of difference, as we collectively share in the production of alternative and oppositional narratives.

Writing about alternative narratives embedded in the work of feminist artists, Josephine Withers (2008) notes that the potentially transformative power of stories to re-weave the cultural fabric is located precisely in their multiplicity, diversity, and partiality:

We are all perforce storymakers . . . In destabilizing received truths these (feminist art) exhibitions can be judged successful. They are polyvocal, and precisely because of this our epiphanies are likely to be partial, perhaps enlivened by only some of the voices . . . The exhibitions of both historical and current (feminist) art discussed here are best thought of as soundings – contingent, parts of a conversation, open-ended. Each such project mirrors back to us who we are becoming . . . And the way it will become our story is by our participating in a collective reading/gazing and speaking (p. 473).

A critically important element in the arguments made by Withers, Trend, and Giroux is their cautionary emphasis that participation in transgressive story-making

must be accompanied by a clear and unambiguous critique of power. Writing that culture is “an organizing principle for constructing borders that reproduce . . . rigid boundaries that both privilege and exclude around categories of race, class, gender, and ethnicity,” Giroux (in Trend, 1992, p. ix) describes culture as performing the role of an invisible gatekeeper – controlling access to, and thus maintaining dominance in the processes of knowledge production. And, as Trend notes, while a “cultural pedagogy in this sense represents both a discourse of critique and a project of possibility” (p. x), it is critical that teachers and learners alike remain flexibly and reflexively attentive to *process* in undertaking the co-construction of new knowledges.

At the same time that I was prompting WAC students to reflectively and collectively participate in story-making, in the anticipation that it would sharpen their engagement with critiques of difference they were encountering in the work of women artists, I and my colleagues in the *Women’s Health and Well-Being* course determined to implement a similarly transgressive praxis in our e-course design. We did so by directing transnational peers to engage in virtual dialogue. We asked them to construct and to share personal narratives, drawing upon their own funds of lived experience, as a means of collectively exploring the affects of gender and other forms of difference upon women’s health and well-being.

A principal aim in undertaking this dissertation research was to discover how learners in both courses perceived the deployment of story as they engaged one another in exploring women’s cultural production or women’s health and well-being. I hoped that analysis of empirical data would enable me to excavate stories elaborated

by students as they collectively explored socio-cultural narratives that were alternative and oppositional to dominant knowledge hegemonies. As documented in this dissertation, student research participants in both courses perceived the sharing of personal narrative to be highly effective in facilitating their critical engagement with cultural narratives of difference, and to their endeavors to collaboratively produce their own alternative and potentially transgressive forms of cultural knowledge.

Framework: Telling Stories, Engaging Difference

My own first awareness of story-making as a “project of possibility” for hearing and creating transgressively alternative and oppositional cultural narratives (pre-dating my experience with Rhodessa Jones by two decades), was both entirely unexpected and deeply personal. In articulating my response to the sculptural stories narrated in the work of Nigerian-born sculptor Sokari Douglas Camp, I realized that as I experienced her stories, I was simultaneously re-constructing my own cultural narrative as well. “Stories cannot be transforming if no one sees or hears them. Sokari Douglas Camp, as artist and as storyteller, appreciates the criticality of audience participation in her work. Her focus has been to produce a sculpture that engages her viewers in the story it tells” (Kimberlee Staking, 2000, p.36).

Vignette: Lost in the Museum

July 1987, Washington, D.C.

Grant (2), and his older sister Sasha (5), are restless as I hurry them through the Smithsonian museum complex beneath the Enid Haupt gardens in Washington, D.C. Both are spotty and itchy, still recovering from the measles, and I am wondering why I thought I could successfully manage this exhausting excursion with two young children. And how had I lost my way from the main thoroughfare into the National Museum of African Art? As the noise of the children

increases, I find myself frantically seeking a way out before we disturb other patrons.

Suddenly, a new noise penetrates my thoughts. I push it impatiently away but although it is not loudly intrusive, it is continuous and insistent. It is a softly whirring noise that seems at least as out of place in this hushed and darkened museum corridor as does the noise of my children. Quite without being aware of it, I turn our caravan towards it, absent-mindedly hushing the children. *What on earth?* I think as I confront a life-sized sculptural ensemble seemingly constructed from steel wires. Two semi-abstract but recognizably human figures fashioned out of wire have their arms extended and are waving something in their hands as they surround a large steel structure of some sort. The motor that creates the waving motion of their arms is the source of the whirring noise. I find the effect to be mesmerizing. I am caught out of time and space for a brief instant as I deploy all my senses to try and take in what is in my field of vision. I find that I have caught my breath and my hands are shaking slightly. Feelings of reverence and awe, surprisingly intense, move me almost to tears as I visually and viscerally take in the sculptural ensemble.



Figure 7: Sokari Douglas Camp, *Church Ede*, 1984¹⁶

With a convulsive start, my insides still in a turmoil of delightful unease from my unexpected encounter with the sculpture of Sokari Douglas Camp, I re-focus on my tired children and continue my exit. Although it will be a decade before I begin my academic engagement with her work, the experience of that first encounter, as a participant to and in her memorial tribute to the passing of her father, has remained indelibly etched in my mind and inscribed on my body.

As I engaged the deeply specific accounts of embodied difference narrated in Camp's "*Steel Stories*" I experienced her story-making as a source of oppositional and resistant cultural discourse (Kimberlee Staking, 2000). Anticipating that if women's studies students were prompted to collectively engage the often oppositional narratives embedded in women's cultural work, they might also experience the power of stories different from their own to produce resistant knowledges, I prompted students to process these visual narratives through dialogically reflective processes.¹⁷

Black feminist art historian scholar Freida High W. Tesfagiorgis (1993) theorized insights that resonate with my multi-sensorial experiences of Sokari Douglas Camp's steel sculptures. In writing about Camp and other Black women artists, Tesfagiorgis calls attention to the ways in which their lived experiences of embodied objectification infuses meaning into the narratives embedded in their cultural production. She argues that their work illuminates an "empowering function to subjectivize the objectified." She posits that in grounding cultural production in their own embodied experiences, Black women artists are able to "transform their subjects from a state of exclusion, marginalization, fragmentation and victimization to one of empowered visibility and action." A feminist account of their work, Tesfagiorgis further asserts, is one that "takes into account the simultaneity-multiplicative construct

of race, class, gender and sexuality fundamental to understanding the lives, thought, production, and interventions of Black women artists” (p.293).

Critical feminist scholarship exploring the simultaneity of “multiplicative” constructs of difference issues described by Tesfagiorgis makes explicit the power of narrative reflection to produce constructive engagement with stories of subordinated experience. Work by Luz del Alba Acevedo and the Latina Feminist Group (2001); Sara Ahmed (2000); Gloria Anzaldúa (1981, 1983, 1987, 1990, 2002); Adrienne Asch & Michelle Fine (1989); Bonnie Thornton Dill & Maxine Baca Zinn (1994, 1996); Analouise Keating (1981, 2002); Mary M. Lay, Janice Monk, & Deborah S. Rosenfelt (2001); Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003); Cherríe Moraga (1983); Judy Rohrer (2005); Benita Roth (1999); Bonnie Smith & Beth Hutchison (2004); and Becky Thompson (2002), has theorized and illuminated the use of narrative to challenge the reification of regimes of power and privilege through the unexamined circulation of oppressively hegemonic cultural norms.

Art historians and cultural theorists have highlighted how the narratives produced in the cultural production of women and marginalized others subjectively explores and contests their embodied experiences of objectification. Scholarship that engages in this critique of difference by focusing on the alternative *herstories* produced by women culture brokers has assisted me in prompting learners to critically and collaboratively examine their assumptions about normative cultural discourse. Scholars whose work has proved especially relevant to mine in teaching the *Women, Art and Culture* course include Don Adams & Arlene Goldbard (2002); Kathy Davis

(1997); Catherine de Zegher (1996, 2006); Jessica Evans & Stuart Hall (1998); Rena Fradden (2001); Sut Jhally (2006); Bernice Johnson Reagon (1993); Gillian Rose (2001); and Ella Shohat & Robert Stam (1994, 1998, 2006).

Texts authored or edited by Norma Broude & Mary Garrard (1982, 1994, 1994, 2005); Lisa Farrington (2005); Amelia Jones (1996, 2003, 2005, 2006); and Carolyn Mazloomi (1998) critically engage the work of specific women artists whose cultural production was explored by students enrolled in the WAC courses. These included Damali Ayo, Judith F. Baca, Judy Chicago, Artemisia Gentileschi, Hung Liu, Rhodessa Jones, Faith Ringgold, Betye and Alison Saar, and Lorna Simpson. Visual media projects edited or produced by Lawrence Andrews, Sandy Brooke and Johanna Demetrakas also interrogate the cultural production of these artists.

Although the thematic lens in the *Women's Health and Well-Being* (WHWB) course was different, similar investments in the role of shared narrative in knowledge-making endeavors were shared by the four teacher/scholars with whom I collaborated in designing this transdisciplinary, transnational course (Staking, 2008). Together we chose to anchor the e-learning design of the course in student-centered processes of dialogic engagement. We anticipated that these virtual transactions would facilitate the ability of learners to negotiate the narratives of difference they would encounter in their transnational explorations of women's experiences of health and well-being (Yusuf-Khalil, *et al.*, 2007).

Incorporating these types of virtual dialogues between online learners into e-learning courses was a relatively new practice when we began working together in

2004. In the interim, scholarship documenting the use of these, and other student-centered learning (SCL) frameworks, in online teaching has grown exponentially. Work describing early uses of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to support SCL in online environments assisted our design efforts, including papers authored by Rita Conrad & J. Ana Donaldson (2004); Yvonne Fung (2004); Kyumgmi Hyun & Eunice Askov (2004); Pat Jeffries (2003); Dina Lewis & Barbara Allen (2005); Lesley Le Grange (2004); Melissa Littlefield & Kendra Roberson (2005); Ian McAlpine (2000); Kim McShane (2004). Together with work by Etienne Wenger (2000), they also proved valuable in my subsequent theorizing the interpretive framework for incorporating the voices of student research informants from the *Women's Health and Well-Being* course into the dissertation.

Experiential Learning: Re/Representing Student Voice

The deployment of a multi-genre writing framework and a descriptively interpretive approach in the sharing of student narratives illustrates the significant potential of centering participant experience as learners in women's studies courses. Engaging these texts, readers will note the expansive spectrum of new understandings that classroom learners elaborate as a result of their transactional engagements with one another within these two differently situated research venues. Qualitative analysis and re/representation of informant voice serves to draw out not only the explicit costs associated with this or any other learning labor, but more particularly the implicit costs to individual learners, their communities of affiliation (in and outside of the academy), and to society at large when knowledge-making in higher education is formally

prompted without provision for dialogic reflection upon the praxis in which learners are engaged (Stephen J. Ball, 1990; Peter Pericles Trifonas & Michael A. Peters, 2004).

The crystallizing lens constructed for the re/representation of informant texts in this dissertation vividly illuminates the perception, strongly shared among learners, that peer collaboration and other student-centered processes prompted them to validate one another as knowledgeable peers in processes of co-constructing and articulating new knowledges relevant to course themes (Pat Campbell & Barbara Burnaby, 2001; Barbara J. Daley, 1997). Crystallized multi-genre writing also vibrantly documents the extent to which many of the participants, including myself and my teaching colleagues experienced collaborative and dialogic processes of meaning-making as opportunities to creatively and constructively engage in teaching and learning as social justice praxis (Peter Trifonas, 2000; Elijah Mirochnik & Deborah C. Sherman, 2002; Jacqueline Cossentino, 2004). The reader will observe these processes of negotiated meaning-making at work many times over in the thickly described framing and sharing of student narratives in subsequent chapters – and will likely be challenged to perform similar negotiations as s/he critically engages with participant texts. In each story of learning shared, Kolb's (1984) description of praxis as a continual cycle of perceiving and processing is explicitly evident.

As reflected through its shared stories, this dissertation thus functions both as a reflective commentary upon, and a synecdoche of the complex sets of processes by which the research participants themselves dialogically explored cultural narratives of

difference about women as cultural producers (WAC), or about women's experiences of health and well-being (WHWB). It also documents their subsequent collaborations in co-constructing new knowledge objects through the articulation of their own cultural narratives. Readers are invited to become active participants in this ongoing knowledge-building project as they reflectively engage in conversation with the stories of learning reproduced in this dissertation.

Endnotes

¹ Kathleen Weiler, bell hooks, and other feminist pedagogues emphasize the teacher's facilitative roles in providing structures that will enable students to interact with one another as knowledgeable peers. Weiler (1991, p. 462) notes, "In terms of feminist pedagogy, the authority of the feminist teacher as intellectual and theorist finds expression in the goal of making students theorists of their own lives by collectively interrogating and analyzing their own experience."

² Transcriptions of participant observations are in possession of the author.

³ King (2004) cites Slaughter & Leslie (1997).

⁴ In his introduction to Trend's book, Giroux notes that it is through negotiations across disciplines, bringing together voices that are emergent and/or marginalized in their resident fields, that one constructs "border pedagogies". Their transgressively alternative theorizing then positions them as usefully resistant in opposition to hegemonic disciplinary discourse.

⁵ Seigfried (2002, p. 18) explains, "Pragmatist theorizing of the multiple and dynamic relationships through which persons are constituted in interaction with their natural and social environment finds new relevancy in feminist theorizing of situated subjectivity, the widespread devaluation of women, the public and private split, and ecofeminist theory . . . [Dewey] was an outspoken critic of logical positivism and developed a theory of knowledge and inquiry that acknowledge perspectivism and incorporated emotional and value dimensions."

⁶ In his introduction, Dewey (1938) declares, "The individual is only a meaningful concept when regarded as inextricably part of his or her society; equally society has no meaning apart from its realization in the lives of individual members."

⁷ In *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey*, Ana M. Martínez Alemán (2001) calls our attention to Dewey's resonance with contemporary critical feminism, noting "I explore John Dewey's assertions on the construction of individuality or in modern terms, identity, and its relationship to learning. Like Dewey, I shall argue that as individuals involved in a dialectical relationship with the world, we are necessarily dependent upon our interactions with those environments for self-realization, a project critical for learning. More important, I shall remind us, as John Dewey did, that recognition of identity in a culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse democracy is the means and end of intellectual freedom and progress, the means and end of feminist education . . . So what we have in Deweyan democracy, then, is the implicit assumption that as a social arrangement, democracy both must be about the identity of its members and must engender these identities" (p. 20). Many other feminist educators (particularly pragmatists) similarly understand Dewey's work as fundamental. See, for example, *The Jane Collective: Feminist Pragmatism* (website), and *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Feminist Pragmatism* (website).

⁸ Underscoring this aspect of Deweyan thought, Charlene Haddock Seigfried (2007, p. 17) writes, "Because concrete experience is so central, experimental inquiry rather than formal logic is the appropriate method for pragmatist philosophers, and because the goal of inquiry is the transformation of a presently troubling or oppressive situation to a better, more emancipatory one, social and political issues are implicated."

⁹ Unsurprisingly, much of the work supporting the construction of technology-rich learning environments is located online. The following are among many excellent sites that have assisted me in theorizing classroom learning collaborations with technology: Paulette Robinson's Dissertation (2000), *Within the Matrix: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Investigation of Student Experiences in Web-Based Computer Conferencing*; Teaching, Learning, Technology, The TLT Group; and The Visible Knowledge Project – Learning, Technology, Inquiry.

¹⁰ In positing that education is never a neutral process, and in arguing that traditional "banking" methods of instruction merely serve to reinforce social hegemonies and hierarchies by "transforming students into receiving objects," who passively learn what ruling elites disseminate, Freire's work, in common with Dewey's, elaborates a theory of knowledge-making in which learners draw on lived experience in their dialogic interactions with others. Arguing that in and through these processes learners would come into critical consciousness, Freire (2005) re-envisioned the classroom as a site where critically aware learners would be aroused to engage in liberatory alliance with others.

¹¹ A range of postmodern, feminist, anti-racist, postcolonial, and queer theories have all played a role in expanding and transforming Freirean critical pedagogy. Moving away from his Marxist-inflected metanarratives, contemporary critical pedagogues have adopted anti-essentialist approaches to the critique of oppressive formations of identity, language, and power. At the same time, they have retained Freire's emphasis on the disruption of oppressive conditions of knowledge-making as a means of accomplishing social change.

¹² Both the faculty workshop and intergroup dialogues were administered under the auspices of the Office of Human Relations Programs, now incorporated into the Office of Diversity Education and Compliance. Student narrative reflections about their dialogue experiences are part of the data archives from the 2006 WAC courses.

¹³ The aim of creating collaborative tasks in the two courses that served as research venues was to prompt participants to engage one another non-competitively and non-hierarchically in negotiating difference in and through dialogic relationships of connectedness. Anticipating that such an environment would be facilitated if difference was authentically experienced and acknowledged, I and my colleagues prioritized opportunities for participants to "own the means of knowledge production" as fully as possible in their collaborations co-constructing digital knowledge projects. Equally, we attempted to model and to prompt virtual and/or face-to-face transactions characterized by trust and reciprocity.

¹⁴ Freire has been a significant academic influence for each of these scholars; they have also worked in deeply reciprocal relationships with one another.

¹⁵ Sandoval (2000) further asserts that the self-conscious deployment of technologies within a "constructivist praxis" permits them to be used resistantly in "reappropriating ideology" (p. 178.9).

¹⁶ Sokari Douglas Camp's sculpture, *Church Ede*, was created in response to the death of her father. Women mourners surround the bed on which the corpse is laid, fanning the air with their handkerchiefs: <http://www.nmafa.si.edu/exhibits/sokari/bed.htm>. Steel, cloth, marine varnish, silver automotive paint; Museum purchase, National Museum of African Art.

¹⁷ As student narratives in subsequent chapters attest, social and digital media technologies deployed in a socio-constructivist framework can prompt deeply experienced transactions even when cultural objects are *virtually* experienced.

Chapter 3: Discursive Constructions – The *Women, Art, and Culture* Course

Vignette: First Day Teaching Jitters

January 2006

Fretfully I rearrange my paperwork and check the computer screen to be certain that my online course site is up and functioning. Aware that tension is building in the muscles of my neck, I shrug my shoulders and arch my back. Inevitably, I am always tense and nervous as I wait to meet the students. I love teaching the *Women, Art, and Culture* course, but at the start of each semester I am always overwhelmed with insecurities, personal as well as professional. Trying resolutely to put aside my worries as what the students will make of me and of the class, I strive instead to imagine what the students will be like. How will their individual identities influence the ways in which they will interact together in the course? Most of them have enrolled to satisfy general education requirements and will have little or no awareness of art history or women's studies, nor a particular interest in interrogating visual culture. As the classroom door tentatively opens, I take a deep breath, and smile a greeting of welcome. I remember, as I do so, the lesson learned from previous semesters – whoever they are and whatever they bring with them into the classroom, the students will become one another's greatest resource.

I just remember when I first walked into the classroom I came in really early and you asked me what my major was, and I said women's studies and you were like, "Oh really? Cool." Then when the class started, you asked a question and no one answered it; I forget what it was. It had something to do with television and stereotypes but I remember you looked at everyone around the room and I was the last person that you looked at, and I was like, "I should say something. I'm a women's studies major." It motivated me to do more work outside the classroom to make sure that I could at least say something.

—Student, *Women, Art, and Culture*, focus group (2007)

Introduction

In asking women's studies students enrolled in the *Women, Art, and Culture* course to contribute empirical data to this research inquiry, I hoped that a qualitative analysis of the data would reveal which aspects of the course experience prompted critical learning engagement.¹ Findings from data analysis have exceeded my expectations, particularly with respect to the revelation that participants negotiated sense-making engagements collectively in and through a wide range of multi-sensory transactions. As highlighted in the matrix of the *Women, Art, and Culture* research venue in Chapter One, situational elements eliciting strong learning engagement were (a) human actors and other human and non-human actants, and (b) more particularly, the discursive constructions of these (actors and actants) around the major contested issues in contemporary art and visual culture being interrogated.

For a significant majority of research informants, then, the transactions that proved most likely to prompt critical engagement in knowledge-making were those that explicitly prompted collaborative transactions among and between the human and non-human actors and actants constituting the learning community. Non-human actants and elements included (a) the use of dialogue as a process for interrogating difference, and (b) all transactions mediated in and through digitally-based learning technologies.² Participants experienced their participation in knowledge-making processes as supporting their acquisition of new skills and knowledges relative to course themes, women as produced in and as producers of visual culture, and as

enabling deepened understandings of their peers as equally knowledgeable and complexly embodied learning partners as the co-constructed new knowledges.

Crystallized re/representations of data from students in the WAC venue, interpretively reproduced in Chapters Three and Four, provide descriptive glimpses of students collaboratively engaged in knowledge-making endeavors through these modes of classroom transactions. Simultaneously, student texts, selectively re/represented, illustrate the value to students of their dialogic and technology-enabled peer collaborations, in assisting them to develop a sharpened criticality and reflexivity as they explored the multiple cultural narratives circulated in and through women's visual representations in contemporary art and culture.

Chapter Three first situates informants within the research situation, and subsequently re/represents texts constructed by students as they dialogically explored and interrogated contested topics with one another. These texts illuminate iteratively deepening processes of learner engagement in a collaborative knowledge-making praxis that is both feminist and constructivist in design. Chapter Four interpretively re/represents students' knowledge-making transactions as they moved from exploratory dialogues to collaborative projects and presentations. As readers engage in and with this multi-faceted praxis of classroom knowledge-making, I anticipate that they will discover not only evidences of participants' shared roles in the co-construction of new knowledges, but also the situated specificity by which a community of differently embodied learners assisted one another to negotiate and to make sense of their multi-sensory learning transactions.

Human Actors: Student Demographics

Your class **did** touch on **more** than gender. You're the fourth Women's Studies class I've taken and you're the first one that actually went beyond gender because we did talk about class and race. And those were two aspects of identity, class and race that I just didn't even deal with. At the beginning there was so much tension around those issues. But it was perfect because we had all these mixtures of identities in our group – me, a Peruvian immigrant, a white protestant male, black man first one to go college in his family, a Jewish Colombian woman, two middle class white females who like went to private school. It was just such a mix and it turned out to be a great group.

— Student, *Women, Art, and Culture* focus group (April 2007)

A total of 80 students were enrolled in the three sections of the *Women, Art and Culture* course from which I collected data during the 2006 academic year.³ The majority of these students were female (86%); they were overwhelmingly matriculated as freshman or sophomores. According to university enrollment information, 51% self-identified as Caucasian, forming the largest racial/ethnic group. Exactly half that number self-identified as Black (26%). Latina/os and students racially or ethnically identified with Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia were each a minority presence. Two of the three sections from which data was collected were taught in the spring of 2006, one at 9:00 A.M. and the other at noon. The third section was an evening course taught in the fall of 2006.⁴

With the exception of the extreme gender imbalance (present in the majority of women's studies courses taught both then and now at the University of Maryland), the composition of the research population conformed with reasonable integrity to statistics for the undergraduate population at the University of Maryland

as a whole.⁵ Thus, while the largest concentration of students, both female and male, were Caucasian, there were male and female students of color enrolled in each section. As noted below, racial/ethnic affiliation for students of color varied from section to section but was present in each of the three sections.⁶ Figures 8 and 9 illustrate the distribution of the research population in these general demographic terms.

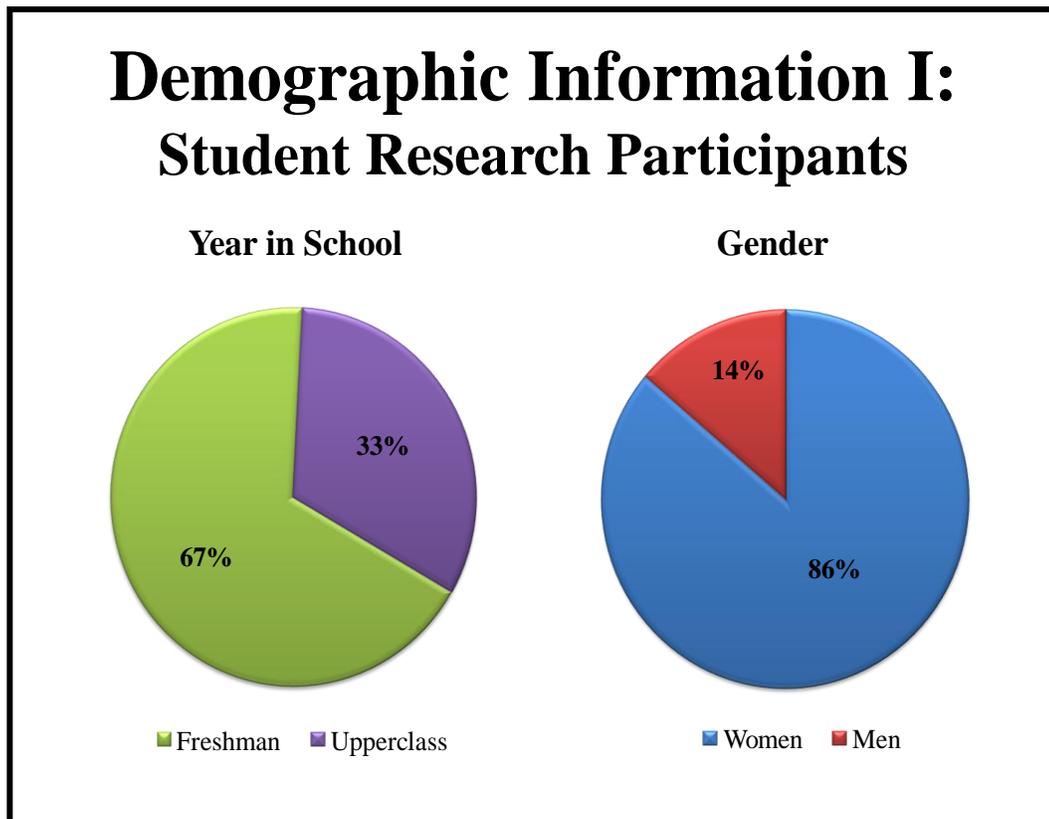


Figure 8: Demographic Information I

Notes: Gender ratio distributed by section:	
Spring semester, sec. 1:	22 women; 3 men
Spring semester, sec. 2:	23 females; 7 males
Fall semester	24 females; 1 male

Demographic Information II: Student Research Participants

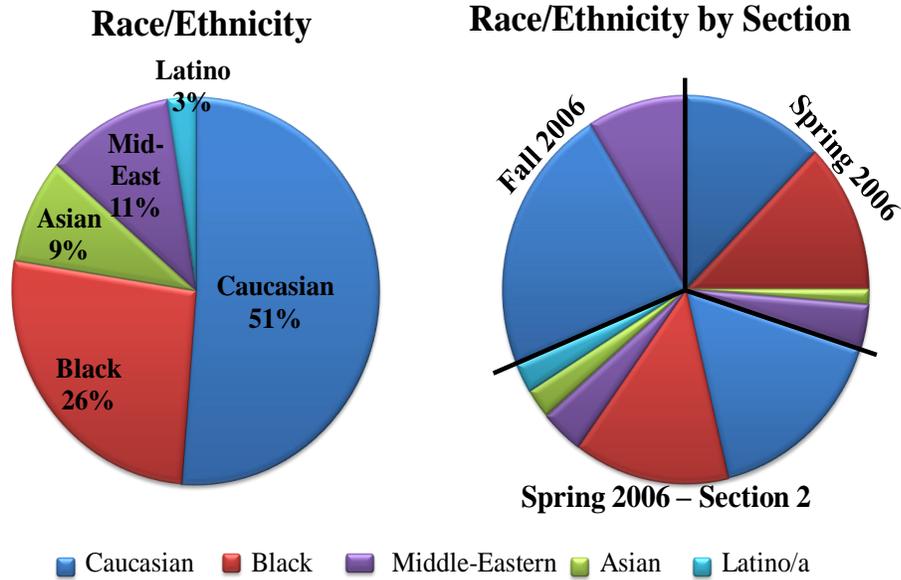


Figure 9: Demographic Information II

Notes:

- (1) In this instance, the category *Asian* is presumed to include students from China, India, and Pakistan while the *Middle Eastern* designation included students from Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia.
- (2) Information on declared majors was also available and is listed below in order from most declared to least declared: Undecided (Letters and Sciences), Business, Marketing, Criminal Justice, Education, Psychology, Accounting, Communication, Jewish Studies, Biology, Biochemistry, Journalism, Speech Pathology, Engineering, Music, Economics, American Studies, Government/ Politics, Dance, Women’s Studies, African American Studies, Theater.

While something useful about the student informant population is captured in these statistical snapshots, qualitative analysis of empirical data challenges the partiality of information conveyed above – probing both what is concealed and what is constructed through these statistics. Concealed, for example, is the degree to

which categories of choice for race/ethnicity were insufficiently descriptive. Two examples will suffice to illustrate this.⁷

At least two of the students who identified as Black actually considered themselves to be bi-racial; there were perhaps other students who also preferred the category bi-racial but did not openly claim the label. Moreover, even the most widely accepted categories denoting bi-racial identity (such as Black/White, Latino/a/Black or Latino/a/White), often failed to capture the complexities of participants' ethnic and racial identities. Consider the multiple salient identifiers in the case of a first generation student from Colombia, an ethnic as well as an observant Jew, who typically passed, however problematically for her own sense of identity, as Caucasian. Equally, the focal point of more than one classroom discussion turned on the expressed frustration of the first generation Nigerian student whose parentage combined Native American, Irish, and Black genealogies, but who was invariably marked only as an African-American male.

Additionally, many 'hidden' identity markers such as sexual orientation and religious affiliation, when disclosed, also proved to be highly germane to learners' experiences.⁸ One student, for example, was very comfortable self-identifying as a gay woman, and included this aspect of her identity in many classroom conversations. While another student's affiliation as an active Muslim woman was rendered obvious by her dress and her in-class discussion contributions, other class members had the luxury of choosing whether or not to disclose their own religious identities and/or levels of participation within religious communities.

Findings also indicate that peer learning transactions in the WAC course often prompted students to challenge tacitly held assumptions of identity as fixed and determinant. As narrative excerpts in Chapters Three and Four illustrate, the pertinence of sexual orientation, religious affiliation, social class, or the impact of being U.S. or foreign born are but a few examples of how less visible aspects of identities, constantly in negotiation with self and with peers, became salient at different moments in students' experiences in the WAC course. In this regard, qualitative engagement with data also evidences the degree to which many students experienced their own embodied identities throughout the course as fluid, and hybrid, yet as critical to their dialogic engagement with others. All of these factors together proved to be immensely significant in a learning situation where feminist contestations of hegemonic practices representing difference in visual media were both at the core of content knowledge, and at the heart of dialogic discussion.

My decision to center situational analysis in my qualitative engagement with student texts, and to center the narrative of the dissertation itself in re/representations of these texts is grounded in my conviction as a feminist pedagogue that any classroom experience will result in some degree of change in student identities as learners, and that the teacher is thus obligated to be attentive to the classroom as a community composed of individual learners (Patricia Cranton (1997); Kathleen P. King (2005); and Catherine M. Casserly & Marshall S. Smith, 2009). With this in mind, I sought principally to engage participants in course transactions by means of our shared (and constantly changing and evolving) identities as embodied learners,

and to solicit data from student informants that might render visible some of these complexities at work in the classroom learning community. Many exit evaluations from both research venues reflected perceptions on the part of participants that their identities as learners were substantively engaged through classroom processes prompting them to engage dialogically with one another across differences of many kinds as they collectively interrogated contested issues. That themes in both venues provoked participants to consider a range of issues relative to embodiment, representation, and identity, is significant to the particular narratives they constructed, but it is not essential to generalizing overall research findings to other classroom teaching in higher education. Overall, the findings in this dissertation corroborate my initial inductive hope (gesturing tentatively towards a hypothesis) that socio-constructivist practices and processes enable, indeed constitute, a classroom learning praxis with transformative possibilities for learners.

Data analysis indicates that the single most effective transactional element for students in the *Women, Art and Culture* course was dialogic exchange in a technology-rich environment. These transactions prompted students to reflectively unpack unexamined and tacitly held assumptions as part of the process of collaborating to produce new understandings. They were consistently singled out by student informants for their ability to produce deepened learning engagement with contested issues. Texts excerpted for re/representation in Chapters Three and Four are selected from those assignments that data indicate to have been particularly efficacious in facilitating these knowledge-making processes. Figure 10, below,

summarizes the organization of the four units through which students explored course themes. Assignments in each unit emphasized feminist and constructivist approaches to exploring and interrogating practices by which women are produced in and are producers of art and popular visual culture.

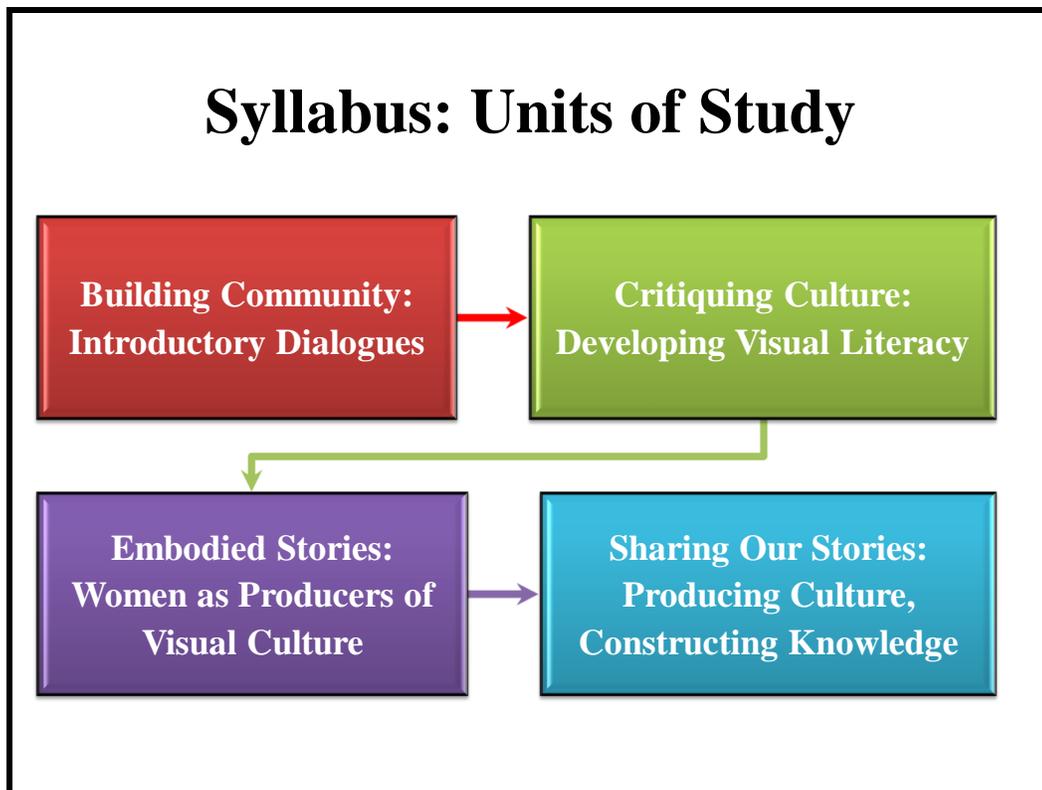


Figure 10: Syllabus – Units of Study

Discursive Constructions: Student Evaluations

As part of my collection of research data from students, I asked them to voluntarily complete qualitative evaluations about their learning engagement at the course mid-point, and again at the end of the semester. In keeping with the inductive nature of my inquiry, these anonymous evaluations were deliberately open-ended. Students were asked to indicate their perceptions of having achieved competency in

stated course objectives, and to indicate which activities and assignments they had found to be most helpful in achieving competencies. Using a three point scale (*below average, average, or above average*), students were asked to subjectively rate the degree of competency they perceived themselves to have achieved with respect to each of the four major course objectives. These findings, comparatively contrasted between the mid-point and the end of the semester in figure 11 below, are congruent with other qualitative analyses of informant data reported in this dissertation. They indicate that even at the mid-point of the course, three quarters of students perceived themselves to have been deeply engaged in knowledge-making processes that assisted them to achieve new competencies in all four areas: (1) understanding women's studies as an inter/disciplinary field and enterprise, (2) developing skills of visual analysis, (3) critiquing constructs of difference through exploring the work women artists, and (4) using digital technology collaboratively to produce group projects interrogating both the work of women artists and contemporary visual culture. Explanatory comments were encouraged and were generously provided by many students. These were coded, and are summarized in figures 12 and 13.

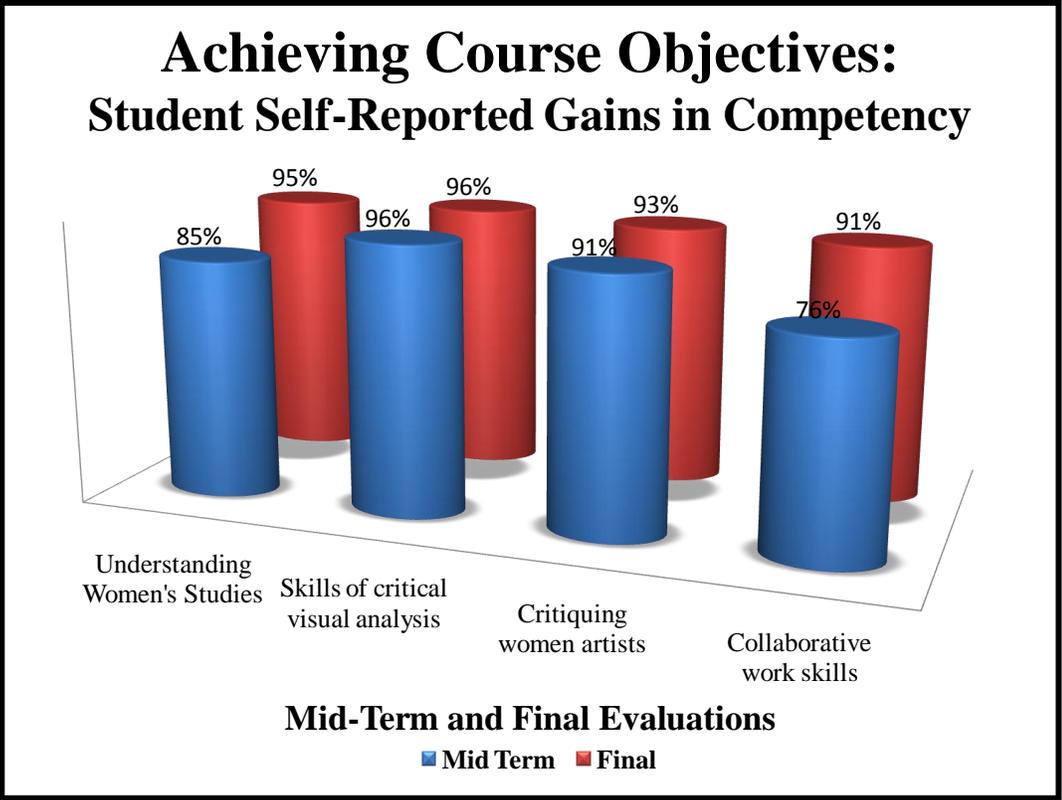


Figure 11: Achievement of Course Objectives

Analysis of participant response in these evaluations corroborates clearly discernible preferences also expressed elsewhere in this document in terms of learning engagement. When interpreted together with re/representations of student texts, students’ perceived preferences for technology-mediated activities, dialogic discussion, peer collaborations, and the collective sharing of stories is strongly underscored.

Perceived gains in achieving competencies at the mid-point were highest in the area of visual analysis as opportunities to develop these skills had been the primary focus of the preceding unit’s activities. The percentage of participants reporting perceived gains at an above average rate also rose in three of the four

competencies *between* the mid-course evaluation and at the end of semester. Participant perceptions about their continued gains in these competency areas are likely due to their deep engagement in activities designed to encourage continued development of these skills. As noted in the figure above, the rise in perceived competency gains between the mid-point and the end of semester is relatively greatest for the final objective, collaborative work skills using digital technologies. This too is due to the distributive flow of activities across the semester. Much of the practice in developing collaborative skills with technology tools came in the second half of the course, as students participated in a series of small group presentations, which culminated in the production of final group projects that were posted to the course technology platform.

In commenting upon learning transactions that they felt had been particularly engaging and useful in achieving course competencies and new skills (see figures 12 and 13 below), participants were not asked to rank elements hierarchically, but merely to note the degree to which they perceived selected tasks to have been effective (or ineffective). Positional findings were graphed based on the numerical value assigned to each activity (5 being the highest positive value; numerical values 0-5 could be re-used at will). The graphic summaries below comparatively illustrate findings from students at the course mid-point and at the end of the semester.⁹ Beyond attesting to the significance that students attached to dialogic, collaborative and technology-enhanced activities, an important subtext emerging from this analysis is that while students perceived a range of assignments in which they

collaboratively analyzed contemporary visual art and culture to be effective, they did not perceive tasks in which they were individually engaged in analysis, or were engaged in via the traditional instructional model of classroom teaching to be as effective or engaging to their knowledge-making capabilities. From among dozens of assignments throughout the course, only those assignments and activities most frequently selected by students in their evaluations are graphed below.

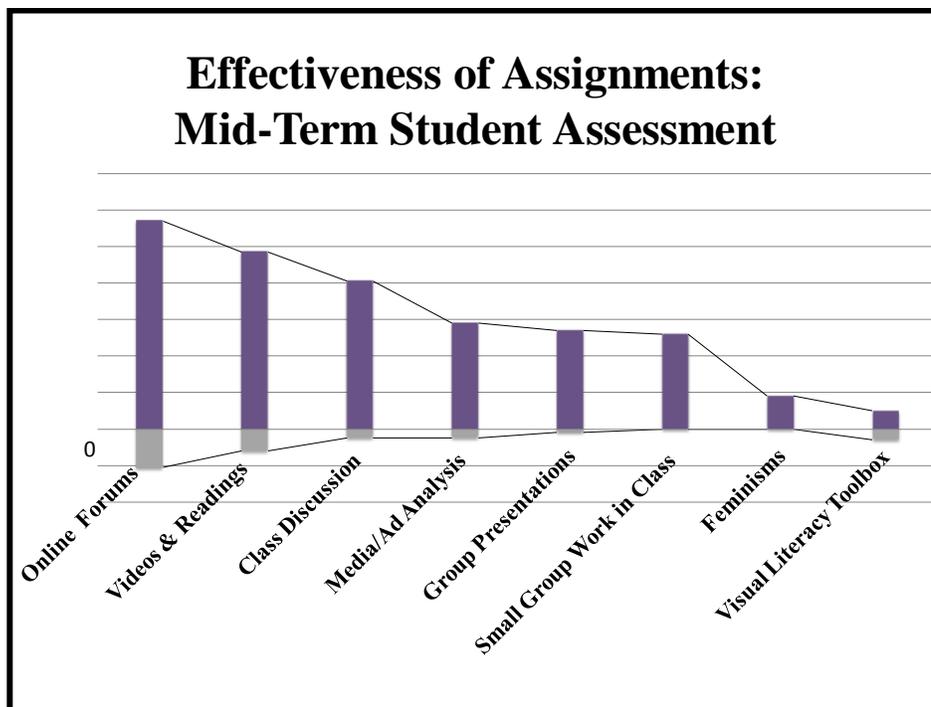


Figure 12: Effectiveness of Tasks (Midterm Evaluation)

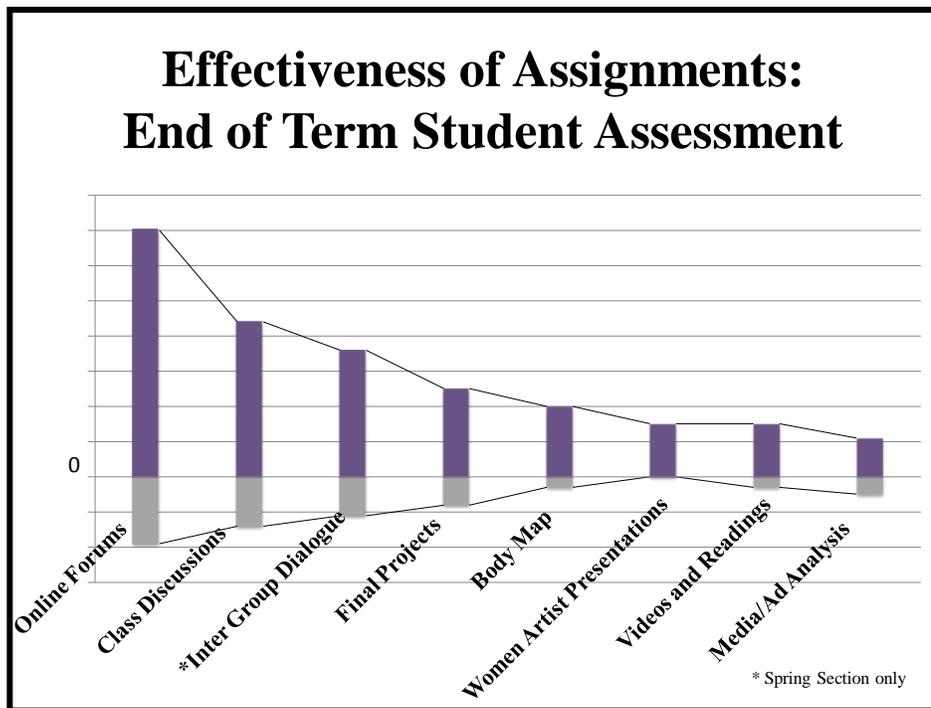


Figure 13: Effectiveness of Tasks (Final Evaluation)¹⁰

Discursive Transactions: Technologies

As an American Studies major, it was really interesting to have a humanities class in the business school! I had never gone to the business school before, so to use all that technology they had there for the humanities, and to look at art in that way, well it was a completely different way to look at women, art, and culture from what I'd ever imagined. I'm usually in the traditional 30-person classroom with desks and a chalkboard.

— Student, *Women, Art, and Culture* focus group (April 2007)

Invariably, students in the WAC courses expressed variations on the sentiment noted above upon arriving at the assigned classroom. After teaching for one semester in a traditional chalkboard classroom, I sought a learning environment that would allow students to more easily access and engage the multi-sensory characteristics of visual media and permit them to engage more robustly in sustained small and large

group discussion and collaborative work. As the four technology-equipped teaching theaters then available at the University of Maryland were chronically underused, I was able to schedule my teaching sections in one of them in each of the seven semesters that I continued as a graduate student instructor for the *Women, Art and Culture* course.¹¹ With the advent of more technology accessible classrooms in the past five years, the questions posed in this dissertation about the socio-constructivist use of teaching with technology are perhaps even more critical to consider. This research identifies questions that are salient about technology classroom environments to consider from the perspective of students. To what degree do they find technology to be an effective and engaging learning tool? Do they perceive technologies to be deployed in ways that facilitate collaborative interactions with their peers and/or with course themes?

In choosing to teach in a technology-rich environment, I hoped that students would come to value one another as knowledgeable peers through discursively constructed interactions with technology that would permit them to “hear” one another’s stories. Equally, I hoped that students’ experience of studying visual culture would be heightened as they engaged it through digital technologies. To facilitate student abilities with respect to these goals, I deployed digital technologies (a) to access internet sources for classroom discussion; (b) to incorporate technology-mediated means of discussion in the face-to-face environment of the technology classroom; and (c) to transact virtual dialogic exchange about course themes beyond the walls of the traditional classroom.

Students' experiences of this technology-rich environment were collected in a variety of ways throughout the course. In almost every measure, they reflected highly favorable perceptions about technology-mediated learning processes, whether experienced within the classroom or through online forums that extended and continued discussion beyond the parameters of the physical classroom.¹²

Representative excerpts of student voice reflecting on their experiences of technology in the WAC course are re/produced below. The first is an excerpt from a focus group conversation reflecting in hindsight on the significance of technology tools such as the *one minute paper* and *multi-chat*, which were used in-class to conduct anonymous, technology-mediated discussions. Students note the utility of such tools to initiate dialogue about potentially controversial topics. Texts re/produced from exit evaluations follow and expand upon the remarks made by students in the focus group.

- Student one: Going off on what she said about the technology that we used, there was one program that we used (1 minute paper) where people could anonymously respond to a question on each computer, and I thought it was really interesting, and I thought it was great to spike off discussion. You may not necessarily feel comfortable raising your hand, especially at the beginning. Like I know people usually don't want to raise their hand. But I had no problem responding to things like that online, and it was something I had never seen before and it was a really good idea, especially in a class that discusses issues on which people may have very strong opinions that are different – some politically correct, some not or whatever.
- Student two: I agree about the one minute paper because a lot of the time you do have an opinion, but you worry what would the other kids think. But because it is anonymous, and you can just put it on the computer and your name won't go with it, you can basically say whatever you are feeling and people won't look at you and wonder

why is she thinking that. You can say it in a way that you won't feel embarrassed.

- Student one: And sometimes, too, you think that maybe this is stupid or obvious, but maybe it is different from what everyone else is saying, but you wouldn't necessarily have said it otherwise.
— Students, *Women, Art, and Culture* focus group (April 2007)

Comments from open-ended exit evaluations:

- I really liked the multi-chat.
- I loved the teaching theater, also the anonymous discussions we could have there.
- It was another good way to get to know classmates, and to get different opinions from different races, genders, ages etc.
- We had great conversations in the multi-chat but sometimes there was not enough time.
- It provided a good atmosphere for discussion.
- It gives everyone a chance to share each other's views.
- I think people sometimes feel more comfortable saying things online than face to face.
- Online formats provided more open dialogue.
- I appreciated seeing how our peers thought about the issues discussed in the course.
- I gained an understanding of others by seeing how they were thinking about the issues.
- It was a way to expose yourself to new ideas.
- I thought it was the most effective activity in the course; it kept me involved and paying attention.
- It was the most effective for me – I loved listening to and learning from everyone instead of the teacher.
- It was fun to have different people's opinions on certain controversial topics.
- The stadium set up for multi-chat is cool.
- I liked anonymous responses.
- Technology allows you to speak your mind more without fear of offending others.

While there was very little negative feedback about the discursive construction of these technologies, one student commented:

- I found face-to-face more personal and engaging than teaching theater technologies.

Participant reflections about technology-enabled discussions conducted out of the classroom were also overwhelmingly positive. A representative sampling of comments follows; they are reproduced in the order of frequency with which they were noted by students in their evaluations.

- Enjoyed the atmosphere of the online discussion
- Appreciated being able to give and receive feedback; the online nature of the discussion was particularly good at allowing this type of collaborative knowledge building
- I liked having discussions online and giving feedback to others.
- Online was better for sharing than face-to-face.
- Extremely useful to have time to think over what to say and make a contribution later rather than having to come up with ideas to share in face to face class discussion
- A sweet way to communicate
- Eye-opening to see how others interpreted culture

Additionally, one student commented that it was very helpful to gain perspective from others not of one's own race in this setting. Although more than 90% of the feedback about online discussion forums was positive, a few potential drawbacks were noted as students pointed out that not everyone wants to have her/his work shared and/or viewed by others, even in an online forum. A few students also noted that in such a setting one may be exposed to ideas that aren't "personally acceptable." The majority of students, however, affirmed the opposite—they perceived online discussion to be a valuable method of being "exposed to new ideas" in a relatively safe environment for discussion.

Discursive Transactions: Dialogue

I liked it that you assigned the groups early because I didn't know anyone. I guess by assigning the groups early, it focused us on talking to each other. I end up enjoying semesters like that where you work

with a bunch of people and they are assigned early enough that you have time to talk to each other and get to know each other before the actual project works starts.

— Student, *Women, Art, and Culture* focus group (April 2007)

The rich menu of technology options available in the teaching theaters were not the only features that marked the course experience as unique for many participants. Students expressed surprise (and some initial degree of consternation) as I prompted knowledge-making transactions through processes of dialogic discussion. Students in the two spring 2006 sections were initially taken aback by a requirement to enroll in a university-sponsored intergroup dialogue seminar experience; this necessitated their scheduling a two-hour block of time each week during the middle eight weeks of the semester.¹³ Despite the general inconvenience of scheduling intergroup dialogue, and reservations expressed by many students about the very personal nature of the dialogue structure prompting students to discuss controversial topics (such as race and gender) across difference, participants almost universally expressed a great sense of satisfaction with their participation in intergroup dialogue as the course progressed.¹⁴

In addition to these formal intergroup dialogue seminars, students in all sections of the WAC course were prompted to collaborative knowledge-making through dialogic processes of discussion in both large and small group formats. A representative sampling of comments by students reflecting on their participation in these discussions is excerpted below. These comments are instructive in providing a deepened understanding of *why* it was that students perceived these types of transactions to be productive.

- Group discussions were helpful in understanding views of other people.
- You learn a lot in open discussions between students.
- You get to know student as well as instructor point of view.
- The in class/ group discussions allowed me to be more open-minded.
- I learned a lot about being respectful of others.
- The amount of interaction was outside the norms of teaching. You offered different styles and activities.
- It was interesting to hear everyone’s ideas even though I didn’t agree.
- I gained a sort of confidence and more trust within my group.

While there were relatively few negative perceptions expressed about in class group work and in-class discussion, the following observations were offered by a handful of students:

- Not everyone says something or pays attention.
- People can be offensive in discussion.
- There is some pressure to talk and give input.
- Sometimes people take things personally.

As evidenced in re/representations of informant texts below, the potential discomfort with the fear that “people might take things personally” was greatly mitigated through the experience of social presence collectively constructed by participants as they engaged in online/technology-mediated forms of dialogue (Paul Kawachi, 2013). For this reason, I frequently prompted students to begin their discussion of contested topics using one of the many available technology tools in the teaching theaters. Texts collected from student as they participated in several of these transactions are re/represented in the following section of this chapter.

Discursive Voices: Unit I

Activities in the first unit of study were designed with two major objectives: (a) to prompt students to recognize one another as knowledgeable learning peers and, (b) to surface (and critique) tacitly held assumptions about contested issues with

respect to hegemonic representations of gender in visual culture. Feminist critiques of difference and the role of women artists in producing alternative cultural narratives were framed as topics of discussion. As summarized in figure 14, below, each activity was designed to tap into and build upon existing student funds of knowledge as they interrogated course themes together. In the process of dialogically sharing stories of their own experiences, and in listening to those of their classmates, students were challenged to critically unpack, and to examine assumptions embedded in both hegemonic and alternative narratives of gender, difference, culture, and visual production. Analysis of student texts demonstrates that as participants engaged these topics dialogically with their peers – in a mixture of digital and non-digital formats – they were prompted to deepened processes of reflection.

Unit I: Introductory Dialogues

I. Introduction to the Learning Community

- **Online Introductions**
- **Technology – facilitated small group activities**

II. Introduction to Women’s Studies

- **Women’s Studies – Theoretical frameworks**
- **Discovery Activities – Feminisms**

III. First Look: Art and Culture

- **Exploratory Discussion – “Endangered Species”**
- **Discovery Activities – Culture and Stereotypes**

Figure 14: Unit 1 – Introductory Dialogues

My low stakes mode of assessment in this first unit permitted students to complete assigned tasks without recourse to knowledge beyond that which they carried with them into the classroom. I hoped that as students built a shared repository of story through dialogic exchange, they would begin to construct relationships of trust and understanding, and that these relationships would support their collaborative work probing contested issues. I also hoped that participants would build upon these initial dialogues as they continued to explore gendered representations with/in visual culture throughout the semester.

From among the many activities in this first unit, four were singled out by participants as having been particularly effective in prompting learner engagement. Excerpts of participant narratives from each of these assignments are re/represented below. Particularly noteworthy about student response to these learning transactions is the fact that they engendered engagement with topics that students voluntarily

continued to explore throughout the course; many of them eventually became the foundation of final project collaborations.

Discovery Activities: Women as Cultural Producers

Students began their exploration of culture not with an object of visual culture, but rather with a musical example, a genre that I assumed they were more likely to be comfortable discussing. I anticipated that students' existing skills of cultural literacy would be validated thereby, and that they would bring a greater degree of confidence to their subsequent engagement with the visual production of women artists. Initial discussion of women's cultural production commenced with a song written by jazz singer Dianne Reeves (1993). "Endangered Species" pays tribute to women's gendered and raced resilience and resistance in the face of male violence.¹⁵ Students completed four writing prompts as they listened to the song in class. Their reflections were then immediately shared in small groups, and remained a useful reference point that carried over into subsequent discussions about women as cultural producers.

Endangered Species

I am a woman. I exist.
I shake my fist but not my hips.
My skin is dark, my body is strong
I sign of rebirth, no victim's song.

Refrain:

*I am an endangered species
But I sing no victim's song.
I am a woman, I am an artist
And I know where my voice belongs.*

They cut out my sex. They bind my feet.
Silence my reflex - no tongue to speak.
I work in the fields. I work in the store.
I type up the deals and I mop the floors.

Refrain

My body is fertile – I bring life about.
Drugs, famine, and war, take them back out.
My husband can beat me – his right they say,
And rape isn't rape you say I like it that way.

I am an endangered species.
But I sing no victim's song.
I am a woman. I am an artist.
And I know where my voice belongs.
I know where my soul belongs.
I know where I belong.

A representative sampling of student responses to the writing prompts follows:

Prompt: What are your first impressions of the song?

Powerful

Passionate

Confident

Inspirational

Empowering

Very provocative

Most common response: I loved it!

Prompt: Note any specific reactions you have to the music or to the lyrics.

Upbeat

Jazz-y

Up tempo

“Jungle beat”

Powerful beat

Lyrics give you a lot to think about

Earthy vibe

Great voice

Raw emotion and meaning is captured in sound as well as in the lyrics

The lyrics are intense but the way she sings them makes them more optimistic

I think these lyrics are really healthy because they state how the artist really feels

The repetition of words is painful but I like the beat and the ideas conveyed in the lyrics

The ideas concerning the strength of women and the way the lyrics reject violence is powerful

I liked the message and the way it was portrayed but the music is not the something I would normally listen to

Prompt: What do you think the song is protesting and/or celebrating?

Oppression

Violence against women

The inequality of women

Protesting the treatment of women

Harmful ways in which society oppresses women

She is protesting and celebrating at the same time

It is a celebration of woman as artist

She is proud to be a woman

Celebrating the strength of women

She is a woman who knows who she is

Celebrating the strength of art to resist

She is staying strong so that she can keep fighting

Celebrating that as a woman she refuses to be a victim

Women are portrayed as strong and independent creatures

Embracing her body and celebrating being a woman in the face of adversity

She is a proud African American woman who respects herself for what she is

Prompt: What else does this performance call to mind?

“I will survive”

“I am woman”

Aretha Franklin; R & B

“Man, I feel like a woman”

Experiences of slavery and resistance

Strong black women like Maya Angelou

You should be proud to be who you are

Definitions of feminism; it encouraged me to be more vocal about my female pride

As these comments reveal, students found “Endangered Species” not only to be engaging, but also to be compelling in its connection to course themes. Also evident in the language used in their responses to open-ended prompts, which invited them to construct their own understandings of the song as cultural discourse, is the

degree to which students experienced this instance of women's cultural production through the mobilization of multiple sensory modalities. Their comments in the discussion that followed also demonstrate that this reflectively multi-sensory learning engagement with "Endangered Species" permitted them to validate existing cultural knowledge, and to begin to construct for themselves a frame of reference for the alternative narratives about women as subjects with which objects produced by women artists are densely inscribed. Sharing their reflections dialogically also proved to be a highly useful springboard to continuing discussions about the field of women's studies, and its relationship to feminism, a topic that students were both *eager* and *anxious* to discuss, and about which they had widely divergent opinions and experiences. Crystallizing re/representations of other student narratives throughout Chapters Three and Four strongly demonstrate that as participants continued to be prompted to dialogic interactions with one another, particularly through technology-mediated transactions, their ability to be less anxious as they engaged in dialogic discussion is palpably evident, as is their capability to be more critically engaged in knowledge-making around contested issues in visual culture.

Discovery Activities: Feminism(s) and Women's Studies

As part of the discovery activities prior to viewing Jean Kilbourne's "Killing Us Softly 3" (2000), students took an online pre-assessment survey querying their knowledge of feminism hosted on the Media Education Foundation website. They then submitted journal entries commenting on the tabulated responses to the survey that I posted online. Although many students noted that they did not find the survey

itself to have been particularly engaging (most students felt the *right* answers were obvious), it is evident in reading their journal posts (representative excerpts of which are re/produced below, following figure 15), that they found the survey responses of their peers to have been more provocative than they had assumed would be the case. These excerpts illuminate how participants deployed their existing funds of knowledge and experience to comment upon the sometimes surprising assumptions about feminism they encountered in the responses of their peers; participants were thereby prompted to think more deeply about their own assumptions as we continued the discussion in the face-to-face space of the classroom.

In general, students taking the survey indicated their assumption that whether or not an individual expressing an opinion about women's rights self-identified as a feminist or not, others would make the assumption that s/he was, in fact, a feminist. While it is unsurprising, given the context of the course (women's studies) that most participants affirmed support for individuals to express (assumed feminist) convictions about women's issues, as excerpts of students' reflective journals clearly indicate, this *politically correct* appearance of support for women and men who articulate (assumed feminist) support for women's issues is misleading. Indeed, as is obvious in participant journal responses, most students actually expressed (a) quite a limited degree of support for positions they assumed to be feminist, and (b) a strong sense of incredulity that individuals taking such positions would actually encounter support from others within a broader social context. The surfacing of these assumptions early in the course allowed students to be aware that their opinions and

knowledge about women’s studies and feminism were different from those of some of their peers – without running the risk of having to openly own a controversial position before students had the opportunity to develop greater group cohesion and trust. Figure 15 summarizes the distribution of responses to a question asking which positions about women’s issues might be considered feminist standpoints.

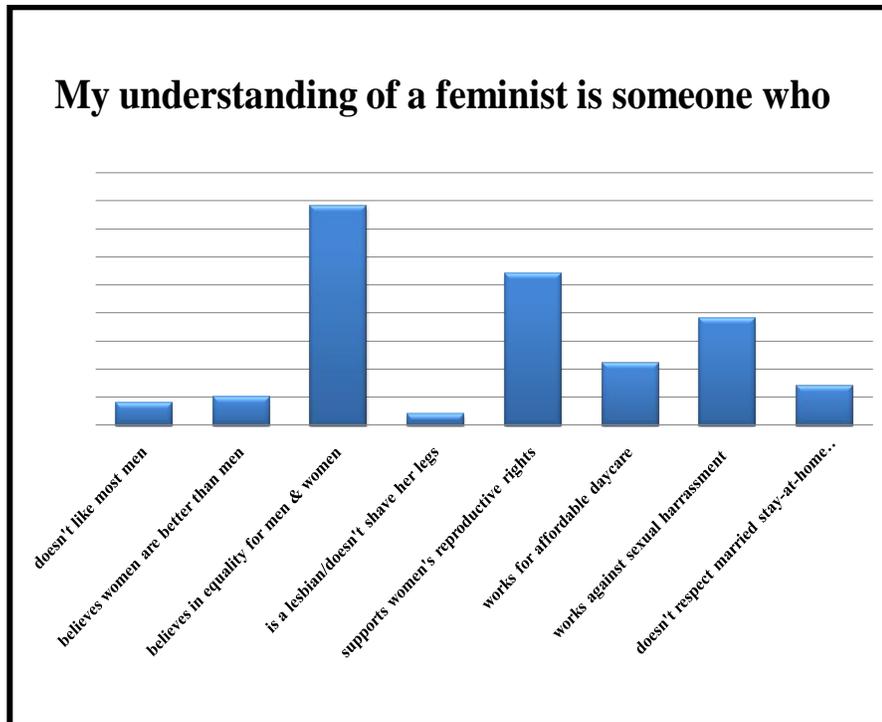


Figure 15: Feminism Survey

Reflective Journal Response, Feminism

Students responded in at least two sentences to three of seven prompts. All students were required to respond to the first prompt, which asked them to reflect on what they felt to be the most surprising finding, as they reviewed the survey results compiled of responses submitted by them and their classmates. As is evident in their

responses, many students perceived a clear disconnect between the responses to the pre-assessment survey from other students, and their own lived experiences.

Representative responses – some reiteration of the first was by far the most common:

- The most surprising finding in the survey results I think was how in the first question most people responded that if a woman voiced a strong opinion they would simply listen. I guess it strikes me as odd because in most circumstances in this society when a woman speaks it usually isn't taken seriously let alone actually listened to.
- I found it surprising that people picked that they would listen to feminists when they talked. I would think that people wouldn't really care if it didn't pertain to them or their own feelings; I found that to be interesting. I would think that if people actually listened there would be a lot more feminists in the world.
- I think that response that shocked me the most was that several people said feminism was not relevant to them personally. This is amazing because even if you aren't yourself a feminist, their actions still affect men and women alike.
- What surprised me the most from the results was that several people said that feminists were people who thought they were better than men. I found that quite interesting because I believe that feminists don't think they are better than men but instead want equality between men and women.
- I think what is surprising is that some people really think feminists do not respect stay-at-home moms. I thought that everyone understood that this is a stereotype. This added to the other labels attached to the idea of feminism show the misconceptions people have about feminists.
- I found it surprising that for the survey, some people actually selected "lesbian" and "bitch" as terms that came to mind when thinking about a feminist. Another thing I found surprising was that a good number of people thought that feminists didn't respect stay-at-home moms. Maybe it's because there are so many different definitions of the term feminism out there that it's hard to decipher whether or not a feminist has to be someone that is a member of the working world.
- I was most surprised that so many people believe that a feminist is a woman who works for equal rights and opportunities for both men and women. I personally believe that a feminist works for equal rights for only

women, hence the name feminist. In our society, it is the women's rights that are lacking, which is why feminists are out there pushing for women's rights to be equal as men. I'm surprised that this answer choice was the 2nd most popular out of the others.

The distribution of responses to the other prompts, summarized below, validated patterns I noted in analyzing reflections to the survey. Answers varied widely, particularly to questions that might be perceived as controversial.

(1) *What does it mean to be a strong woman? Are strong women always feminists? Explain your reasoning with an illustration.* Approximately half of respondents chose to reply to this prompt. Only a few respondents believed that a strong woman was also necessarily a feminist.

(2) *Why do some people consider "feminist" a negative label? Why do some women resist being labeled feminists? In what ways does disavowing feminism keep woman from accessing power and autonomy?* Approximately a quarter of students responded to this question. One third of them felt that feminism represented a threat and/or was too far removed from the mainstream while two thirds expressed the opinion that media stereotypes were largely responsible for people considering feminist a negative label.

(3) *What role can girls and women play in diversifying the image of what it means to be a woman in our culture? What role can boys and men play?* Less than a tenth of students chose this prompt. Those who did, however, articulated positions about the troubling disconnects between women's lived experiences and their ability to enjoy cultural and social equality and about the objectifying representations of women most commonly depicted in contemporary mass media. These themes would continue to preoccupy many students throughout the course experience.

(4) *What characteristics are considered "feminine" in our culture? Are these understandings universal across racial, gender, age and class lines? Do other cultures consider different characteristics to be "feminine?"* Eight students responded to this question; three felt that feminine characteristics could be considered universal while five did not.

(5) *Do you feel that the culture is opening up, that it has started to embrace more willingly women and girls that go against the traditional feminine type? If so, why do you think this is happening? If not, why not?* Approximately one quarter of students responded to this prompt, all but one of them expressing the opinion that the culture is opening up to embrace non-traditional expressions of the feminine. Explanations for this varied and included the following insightful observations: (a) that feminism is responsible for the opening of the culture, (b) that women create change for themselves, and (c) that female role models make a difference as do positive media portrayals.

(6) *Should men be concerned about women's freedom, health and equality? Why or why not?* One half of all students chose to respond to this prompt; all emphatically asserted that men should be concerned with these issues.

This was an excellent way to see different points of view and get a lot of ideas besides my own in thinking about a topic that always seems to be controversial.

— Student, *Women, Art, and Culture*, journal post

As noted above, participants were very positive about their opportunities to engage both in individual reflections about assigned readings and in group discussion as they explored positions about women's studies and feminism that were not necessarily congruent with their own. In addition to journal postings, they continued these discussions in other technology-enhanced modes of discussion available in the technology teaching classrooms (such as the "multi-chat" and the "one minute paper"). These modes of discussion allowed course participants to anonymously share opinions in real time about contested topics, thus permitting them to acknowledge their positions and *test the waters* without having to openly own a potentially controversial perspective. Such discussions were always followed by large group discussions that were animated, but dialogically grounded in exhibiting respect for peers, whether or not they were in agreement with positions articulated. As these technology-facilitated modes of real-time discussion were perceived by students to be highly engaging learning transactions, and to be productively facilitative in processes of reflectively articulating new understandings about course themes in collaboration with their peers, they were utilized throughout the semester.

Students concluded this portion of the first unit by writing and sharing their own definitions of feminism with their classmates. Of particular note is the fact that definitions of feminism were largely affirmative, and that students were critically

specific in noting rationales for the positions they articulated. These definitions are all the more remarkable given the degree of skepticism about feminism with which participants had initially approached the topic a few weeks earlier. For reasons of length alone, my selection of textual excerpts for this and all other assignments is partial, re/presenting those that in my judgment best re/produce the range and relative frequency of the diverse positions articulated by student informants. Student texts, however, are generally not revised or shortened, but are presented verbatim.

Feminism Is: Representative Definitions

- What I have gained from this class is that feminism is one hundred percent collaborative. This idea is supported in one of the definitions of feminism from our reading: “Feminism is the political theory and practice to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbians . . . Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement.”
- Feminism is a movement, it is a combination of theories, and it is a collection of philosophies. It is a social, political, and economic movement, a movement searching for equality between men, and women.
- Feminism is advocacy of equality between the two sexes. The term is often misused. Although the term implies that women are at a disadvantage in society, people often think women are placing the blame on men whereas they are actually working to make the larger public aware of the situation and find ways to solve it or establish peace.
- Feminism for me is the fight for the rights of women and showing the world how women affect everyone’s everyday lives. Women hold up “half the sky” and we are going to make sure everyone else notices it.
- Feminism is pride in women and pride in the differences between women. Believing in feminism is believing in the free will of women to fight to obtain the same opportunities for all.

- Feminism is empowering, not limiting or discriminating. In my experience, feminism has helped to give women confidence and opportunities.
- A feminist is “a person, female or male, who is not prejudiced based on gender or sexual preferences”. This definition opened my eyes to the fact that men can be feminists just as much as women.
- To me, feminism is a belief that both women and men may share – that is that neither males nor females should have to adhere to traditional expectations or norms regarding their gender. In class we discussed stereotyping. My definition of feminism would not agree with such labels. These stereotypes not only negatively affect women, but men as well. For example, why can’t a man stay home and care for the family if he chooses to? Feminists refuse these expected behaviors and argue that women and men should have the right to choose their path in life whether it is traditional or not.
- Feminism is about making women feel powerful enough to take over their lives and take on more responsibility as leaders of society. Feminism is not about punishing or hating men for trying to oppress women for so long, but to make sure that women have the same rights as men. The idea that “Women’s liberation will also contribute to the liberation of men,” is definitely true. I realized for the first time that social roles not only hurt women, but men as well.

Discovery Activities: Cultural Stereotypes

Students first utilized the “one minute paper” in this activity. Reflections indicate that participants perceived it as a highly meaningful interaction, not only because it permitted them to participate anonymously in discussion about a contested topic, but it also allowed for the immediate and anonymous sharing of all responses with the entire learning community in face-to-face discussion. Students responded online via the “one minute paper” tool to a prompt that directed them to describe an incident of stereotyping that they had personally witnessed or experienced.

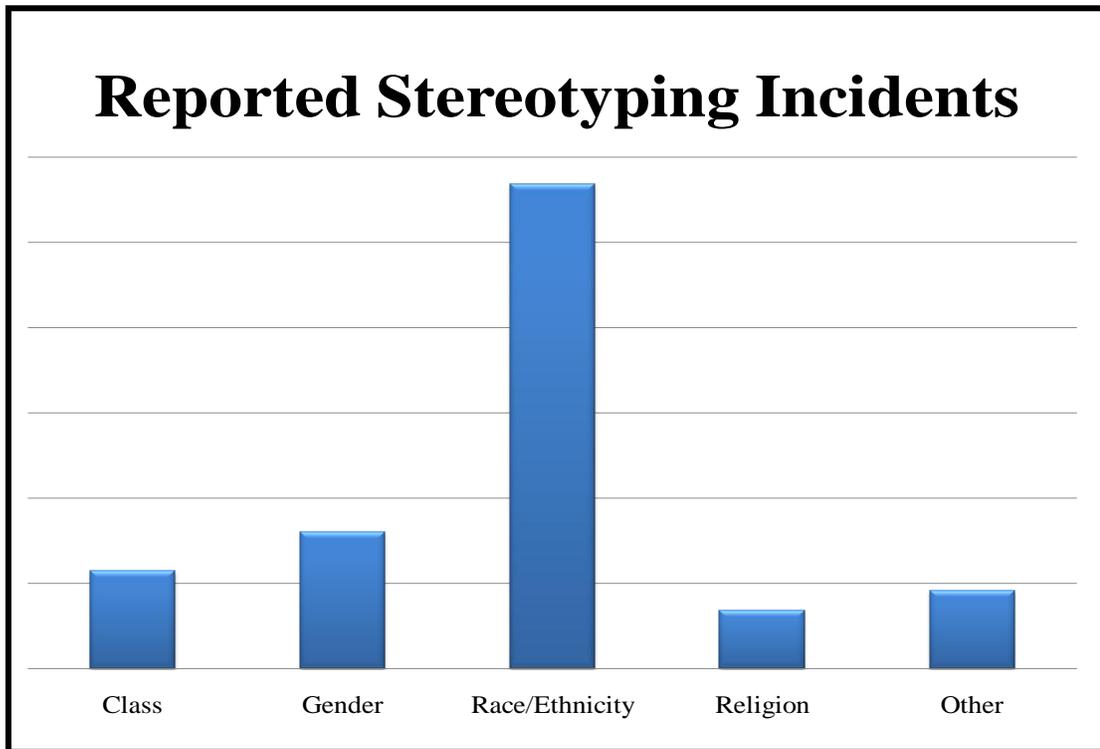


Figure 16: Reported Stereotyping Incidents

Figure 16 compares student responses according to the most salient type of stereotyping incidence. Note that of types of incidences reported/identified in each response, racial and ethnic stereotypes are by far the most common. These categorizations of the incidents were produced by students themselves. Following their anonymous responses, and a large group discussion about them, students worked in small groups to label the types of stereotyping reported by categories of difference such as race, gender, etc. Due to the complexly intersectional nature of constructs of difference, this was a productively and provocatively challenging exercise for students. In their discussions, students noted that many of the incidents tagged in the category of race/ethnicity appeared to depend as well on underlying (and unexamined assumptions) connecting race/ethnicity with a low socioeconomic

status and/or level of educational attainment. Similarly, an example that provoked lively, even heated, discussion was the categorical insistence of women athletes in the course, based on their lived experiences, that their perceived athletic abilities were judged not only on the basis of their gender, but also on unmarked or unnamed assumptions about their sexual orientation. Representative excerpts selected from student texts are below.

Representative Responses – Stereotyping Incidents:

- I played sports in high school and now sometimes I play here at the U of M for fun. Anytime I am on the basketball court where there are already guys playing, they never really think a girl could be good at sports, let alone be able to play and beat boys. This happens frequently and it is an incident of stereotyping because the basketball players judge my skills based on the fact that I am a girl rather than watching me play and then deciding what they think.
- Coming from a town that was not very diverse at all, I was one of the few Jewish students in my high school. My friends would jokingly make fun of me for looking at sales or trying to save money, saying I was “cheap” because I was Jewish when most of the time they did the same thing.
- When I found out that I got into UMD, a lot of white people at my school felt that me and other African Americans in my class only got in because we were Black. They felt that the university admitted us through Affirmative Action.
- Last year I celebrated Eid (the annual Muslim holiday). Every year we dress in full gear from head to toe in traditional dress. Before the festivities, I stopped by CVS drugstore and bought a pack of gum. As I was waiting in the cashier line, two young boys came up to me screaming, “Look at the terrorist.” Just because I was wearing a head dress, they obviously thought I was part of a terrorist group.
- I used to play basketball in high school and because I was a girl, I was always assumed to be gay, which was always very stereotypical.

- One time I was at a wedding and someone asked me what my major was. When I replied American Studies he said I threw him a curve ball and he thought I was going to say biomedical engineering or something very science oriented because I am Indian.
- I am a black male that attends the university and because I am from Prince George's County, Maryland, people are surprised that I am in college and believe that the only reason must be because I'm an athlete, which I am not.
- An incident that I witnessed first-hand took place when I saw someone of African descent being taunted and made fun of openly. The predators were running around acting like monkey and making monkey sounds.
- A group of white kids at school assumed I didn't want to go the country club to play tennis with them because I am half black and identify that way. In reality, I was a member of the club and played there in tennis matches and tournaments.
- With the aftermath of Sept. 11th, it got really hard to go to school without being harassed almost every day. One specific time I was walking to class and minding my own business, and the next thing I hear is a student saying, "You terrorist" and then laughing. To them it was funny, but I took it very offensively because not all people from the Middle East are terrorists. What people fail to realize is that many people in New York affected by 9/11 were of Middle Eastern descent. We are all on the same side.
- Every time I tell someone I am into women's studies/feminism, I get the whole "feminazi" spiel, and people preface their stories with something like "you're not going to like this, but" as if feminists cannot have a sense of humor.
- When I sat down in my first computer programming class, the guy next to me asked if I was in the right class. I knew I was definitely in the right class and when I told him this, he told me he was surprised because he hadn't ever seen a girl that 'took care of herself' in a programming class.
- I'm black and my roommate is white. I was listening to the April Levine CD and my roommate came in and said, "I didn't know coloreds listened to punk rock." I was so shocked and appalled at

what she said I had to hold myself back from saying something mean or hateful and quickly left the room.

- I was standing next to a friend of mine when two white girls approached him. One of them asked if he was a football player. Before he could speak, her friend said, “He’s tall, skinny, and black. Assess the situation. Obviously he’s a basketball player.” We just looked at her in disbelief.

As students read through these statements, and shared their reactions with one another in dialogic discussion, I was astonished at the degree of their visceral *and* reflexively critical engagement with constructs of difference and the structures of inequality that they enable. My frame of reference was discussions on this topic that I had prompted many times in previous semesters through lecture, readings, and journal reflections. In previous semesters I had always sensed that despite the course design I constructed, and the material that I introduced, students were not affectively prepared to collectively interrogate stereotypes. The comparison between previous semesters and the discussions in all sections of the 2006 course that contributed research data was dramatic, and has encouraged me to continue to deploy technologies and dialogic discussion to facilitate collaborative and socio-constructivist knowledge-making transactions that draw explicitly on student funds of knowledge and lived experience, and that will engage their participation through a range of sensory modalities.

Discovery Activities: How Does your Learning Connect to your Previous Knowledge?

Having devoted significant classroom time and participant resources to prompt transactions intended to assist learners in building peer relationships that would enable productive collaborative partnerships, I concluded the first unit by

querying students as to what they perceived to have been most significant in their learning interactions thus far in the course. I anticipated that they and I would benefit from hearing and discussing one another's perspectives. As with all student data collected, these texts were not solicited, nor are they presented, as an actual measure of student learning outcomes; rather they were intended to provide the community an opportunity to reflectively dialogue with one another in anticipation of the units to follow in which they would be collaboratively critiquing gendered representations in mainstream visual culture and exploring the work of women artists. They are re/represented here because of their high degree of relevance not only to the growth in student learning engagement but also to this course trajectory. These responses, constructed after the first unit of study, make explicit the degree to which many students were previously unaware of the frequency and means by which women's bodies are objectified in popular visual culture.

Analysis of student response also validated concerns I had brought to the research project with respect to emotions I had experienced in previous semesters – feelings that I had not provided students with transactional learning opportunities that permitted them to discover their tacitly held assumptions about the visual media saturating their lived experience, nor to query their unexamined consumption of it.

Student responses to this question, constructed via the ‘one-minute paper’ teaching theater tool, were displayed anonymously on the overhead screen, serving as the catalyst for a face-to-face discussion that prompted participants to carefully consider and consolidate new knowledges going forward. Figure 17 is a graphic illustration of the distribution of responses coded according to their relevance to course assignments; a representative sampling of participant responses (excerpted) is included below the graph. These re/representations illuminate the degree to which participants perceived themselves to have been prompted to think deeply about contested issues with respect to gender and visual culture at the beginning of the second unit of study.

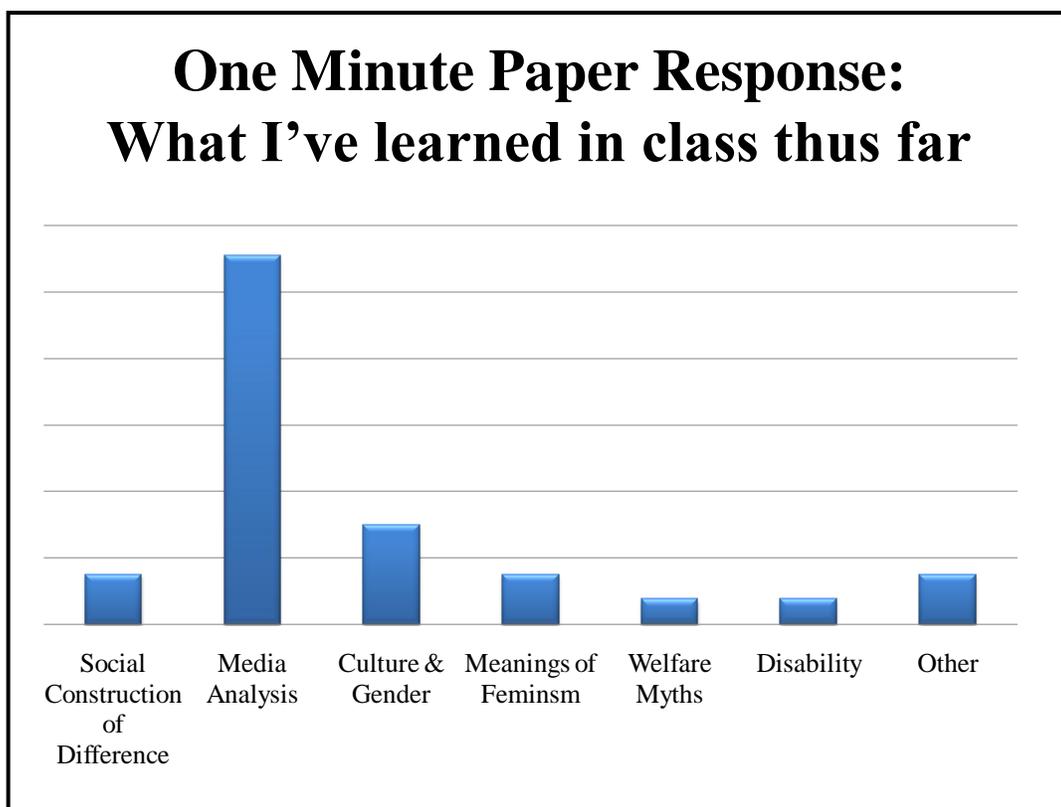


Figure 17: One Minute Paper Responses

Prompt: What have YOU “learned” so far in the course? New knowledge? New perspectives?

- In this course I have learned a lot about the portrayal of women in society and in the media. The course has also opened my eyes to many issues between women among different classes, not only race.
- I have learned about gender roles in society; I didn't know that women were represented in a certain manner in ads and media. The women are portrayed in a specific way; they are seen as how they are supposed to be.
- I have learned to look at media differently. I can pull out the hidden meanings now. Before I knew there was the whole issue of “boy bias” but after reading that article and discussing it further in class, I'm really able to point it out in the media and in the real world.
- I have learned to be more understanding of others in a variety of ways, ability, race, gender, and class in particular. By having a diverse class, I have seen other's perspectives (mainly race) as they relate to my classmates. It's one thing to hear that stereotypes are bad, but it's more effective to hear students' stories of how they have been discriminated against. I think people's personal stories and discussions are most helpful. Group is also a great way to meet different people and explore diversity.
- In this course, I have learned a lot about the hidden meanings and gender representation in ads. I learned how to analyze certain ads. Before I never used to look so deep into what magazines really advertised. I never really paid attention to that but now it is clear to me and it makes a lot of sense. I actually find it quite interesting to now be able to look through magazines and find the meanings and analyze ads.
- I guess one thing I have learned more about would be how the media stereotypes gender. Men are generally portrayed as strong and almost “fierce.” Women are seen to be passive and usually portrayed in a sexual manner. In other classes I learned about how the “true” woman was portrayed in the 1800s and although it isn't as drastically portrayed today, I can still see how that stereotype of women has carried through to today.

- I didn't realize all the different definitions of feminism. There is always the stereotypical definition of feminism. Now I realize that there are other definitions as well.
- I have learned to analyze media in a completely new light than before. I am now able to recognize the true signs of how marketing works to sway our minds to think about certain ways and believe certain things about products.
- I have learned so many different meanings of womanism and feminism, and I learned women play a most important role in our society.

The journal prompt that accompanied this assignment asked students, “What did you find to be the most important, exciting, troubling or controversial topic to emerge from this unit of our course? How does this discovery connect to your previous knowledge?” Responses, which were self-selected by students, are comparatively graphed in figure 18, and fleshed out through representative excerpts that follow. They supply many indicators as to why students perceived dialogically grounded activities to have prompted engaging and effective learning interactions. Many again underscore perceptions, reported by students in other data, that dialogues were highly germane to processes of knowledge-making.

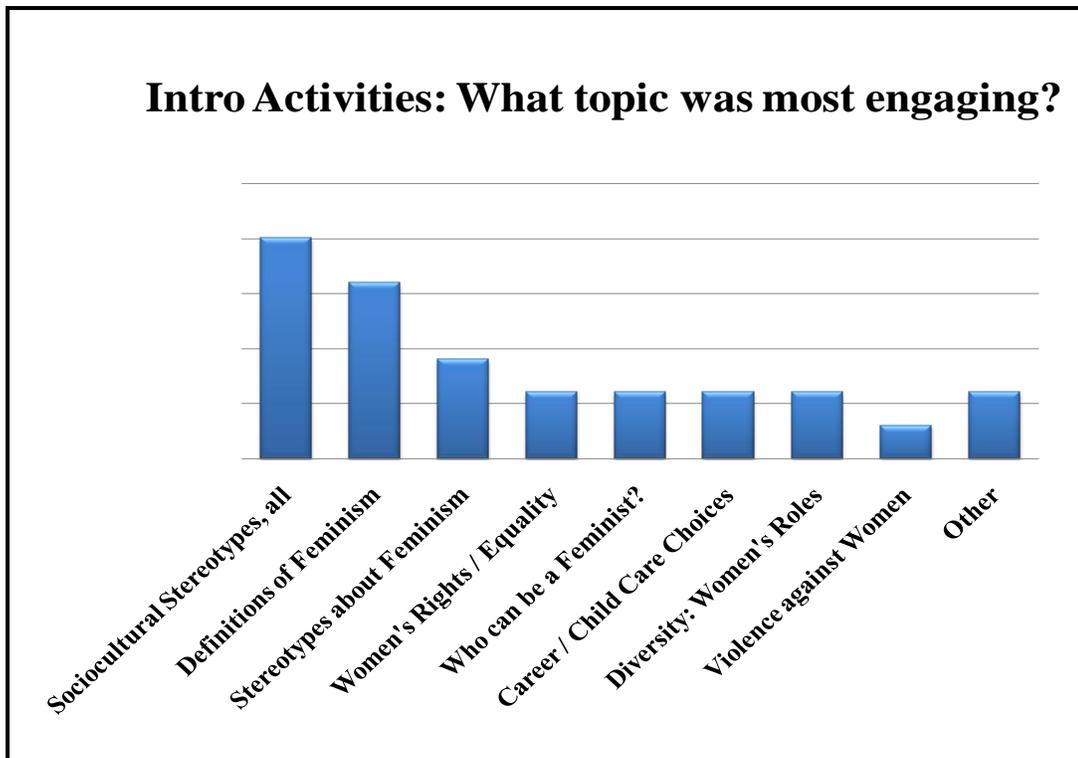


Figure 18: Intro Activities – Most Engaging Topic

Prompt: What did you find to be the most important, exciting, troubling or controversial topic to emerge from this unit of our course?

- I believe the most important topic discussed in class was the effect media has on what we find to be acceptable or expected, in most cases, from women. The media's influence can be extremely detrimental or helpful, depending on how it's used, in the case of a number of stereotypes within our society. This issue can be quite controversial but I believe it's something we've grown immune to and should start questioning amongst ourselves.
- The one most interesting thing was during the multi-chat session. The chat group I joined was "Who can be a feminist?", and I found that almost no one had an identical opinion on who could be a feminist. I personally believed that it could be anyone who supported equality of the sexes, but others claimed that only women could be feminists as they were the only ones who really knew what it was like to experience societal discrimination as a woman. Yet others argued that both could be feminists, but men are a different sort of feminist because of their different experiences. I found this to be a

wonderfully interesting discussion and hope to continue hearing opinions throughout the semester.

- I think the most controversial topic we have discussed so far is the definition of a feminist. There are so many different points of view, and because that definition is based on your view and how you see things it's hard to define.
- I feel that the most troubling topic was reading about how women's rights began to expand and then were taken away in the past. This surprised me very much because I always thought that we had moved forward, and it scares me because I hope that it will never happen again.
- I found it troubling that if a woman speaks her mind, she is seen as a bitch. Why is it that if a woman is outspoken she would receive such a negative label. It reminds me of when I took WMST263 and we discussed the role of women in society and how they are to take up as little space as possible. I guess we as a society have not broken out of that idea that women are to be seen and not heard.
- The thing I found to be the most troubling in class is when we did the anonymous exercise in which we shared our experiences with stereotypes. I was shocked and surprised about the racial profiling that was going on, especially against African Americans, and those of Middle Eastern descent. It was troubling to know that people could judge you even before they knew who you were and say things of such a racist nature about someone.
- I found the most troubling topic in class discussion to be the discussion of stereotypes. It was troubling to see just how prevalent stereotypes are still today. These stereotypes were not only about sex, but race, ethnicity, and religion.
- I think that the most sensitive topic that we discussed is the topic of stereotypes; I believe it's sensitive because stereotypes are quasi true. This feeling that stereotypes are always wrong is not true, which may offend some people.
- The most interesting exercise . . . was when we shared stereotypes that we have witnessed or experienced. It was not only shocking to hear some of the stereotypes people have encountered, but to also realize that I myself am guilty of attributing stereotypes to others. Stereotypes are hard to get rid of, but it's well worth the try.

- This probably isn't the exact answer you're looking for, but here it goes anyway. I would say that the most important thing we have done in this class so far is the introductions and meeting our peers. I think the interactions we've had in this class will definitely help us feel more comfortable with each other, therefore making it easier to open up and learn in a group atmosphere. In a big university like this, I think it's harder to meet people in your classes. I like that I am already starting to meet people in this class.
- I think the most surprising finding would have to be that someone's response that a woman with strong opinions on women's right issues is a man-hater. I believe this stereotype is unfortunately, quite commonly perpetuated in today's media. Being as though most people don't really know a women's rights advocate personally, we automatically accept the image portrayed in the media to be true. I find it extremely hard to believe that every woman who is committed to speaking against female discrimination actually hates all men. I think the assumption and the stereotype is preposterous.
- I was surprised that people think feminists are women who don't respect married stay at home moms. Feminism is a belief system in which ALL women's experiences and ideas are valued. How can one be a Feminist yet EXCLUDE a particular group? Also, men are not excluded – men as well as women can be feminists. Women and men should be economically, socially and legally equal regardless of race, religion, social class, age, etc.
- I believe the most important topic . . . was the definition of feminism. In a course called Women's Studies, you need to discard any preconceived notions and start with a well-defined notion of what it means to be a feminist.

Beyond new understandings constructed about women, art, and culture noted in the excerpts of participant texts above, one also discovers *stories* embedded in these snippets of student voice. These stories reflect the ways in which participants had begun to grapple with issues of difference as they interacted critically, (and not always without contestation), with peers in collectively unpacking assumptions about controversial topics. Similar stories resonate in the work they continued to

produce throughout the duration of the course, each articulating transformations participants experienced in their discursively collaborative and constructivist knowledge-making transactions with peers and other human and non-human actants (e.g. technologies). As students continued iteratively to perceive, to process, to share, and to co-construct alternative stories through these collaborative transactions, their experiences of critically engaging with competing constructions of gender and other categories of difference in visual culture were increasingly dense with meaning.

Chapter Four begins with interpretatively framed re/representations of transactions in which students were engaged as they were prompted to build on these initial and exploratory dialogues in developing and refining skills of visual analysis. The chapter continues with narrative re/representations of knowledge-making transactions as students applied skills of visual analysis to the work produced by women artists. Chapter Four concludes with a summary of group projects constructed to interrogate gender discourse in practices of visual representation. These culminating projects were digitally produced, posted to the course management platform, and presented to the entire class in the final unit of study.

Endnotes

¹ As noted in Chapters Five and Six, my colleagues and I anticipated that similar methods of exploratory dialogic inquiry would facilitate constructive engagement between virtual learning peers as they collaboratively interrogated topics related to women's experiences of health and well-being.

² Syllabi describing all assignments and activities in the 2006 WAC courses from which data was collected are archived online in the author's dissertation wiki; see appendices.

³ Departmental statistics indicated that the majority of the students enrolled each semester in the WAC course were females in their freshman or sophomore year of study. A few juniors and seniors (males and females), having previously neglected to satisfy the general education requirements for which this course is one option, were also enrolled each semester.

⁴ Although enrollment per section is capped by the women's studies department at 25 students, instructors are permitted to oversubscribe. As the noon course was by far the most popular time offering, I allowed that section to become oversubscribed by five students. All students in the fall 2006 course were freshman, provisionally admitted to the university under the auspices of the "Freshman Connection" program, see <http://oes.umd.edu/index.php?slab=freshmen-connection> for more information.

⁵ It was also extremely similar to the aggregate profile of students enrolled in sections of the WAC course in each of the previous four semesters in which I had taught.

⁶ While all sections did not have equal representations of racial and ethnic groups (except for the presence of the majority Caucasian population), analysis of informant narratives demonstrates that participants in each section were similarly deeply engaged through dialogic conversation with peers whose identities of otherness challenged their meaning-making negotiations. Given this finding, analysis of narratives is not separated out by section as it did not further illuminate the research inquiry.

⁷ Late into my data analysis, I realized the inadequacies of this reporting system. By the time I noted the challenges posed, while I was attempting to construct a sufficiently nuanced description of the learning community, I was no longer able to contact participants and ask them to self-select their own racial and ethnic categories.

⁸ Equally obvious, however, is that there is no way to adequately measure or represent the potential impact on learners of those aspects of participant identities that students chose not to disclose. For example, one student who identified herself to me as a single mother chose not to disclose this to her peers, because, as she explained to me, she feared being reduced to the statistic of “another single black mother” in the eyes of her peers. Many students reflected explicitly in their private journal postings on “invisible” identity markers that they were not comfortable disclosing to their peers.

⁹ Only those activities that were most frequently selected by participants are depicted in these graphs. Due to the scheduling availability of local cultural events and the inability of fall students to participate in Intergroup Dialogue (see notes 13 and 14), some activities were experienced only in the spring or the fall sections of the course. This has been accounted for in constructing the comparative scale utilized in summarizing data. Activities and assignments receiving a different ranking at the course mid-point and the end of the term are likely impacted by how recently students had experienced them.

¹⁰ Although students were very productively engaged in constructing their culminating projects, narrative feedback accompanying the final evaluation explains that this assignment was not more highly ranked due to the stresses of using the very cumbersome WebCT technology platform. Based on this feedback, I constructed a class wiki for the posting of final projects in subsequent courses, including the *Women's Health and Well-Being* Course; this has resulted in more rewarding processes and satisfying learning outcomes for students.

¹¹ These technology classrooms were located respectively in the schools of business, computer science, engineering, and plant sciences. In the five years that have elapsed since I collected data for this project, much has changed about the availability and use of technology in the university classroom. Many, indeed the majority of classrooms at the University of Maryland are now technology equipped to some degree. At a minimum, almost all classrooms support internet access on student laptops. Many have projector consoles and other features to integrate digital technologies into classroom instruction. (With these changes, however, only two of the four more fully equipped teaching theaters that I utilized are still centrally

managed and available to all interested faculty. Those in the Business and Engineering Schools are now managed by their respective administrative centers and only used by faculty in those schools.)

¹² The one exception, noted in Chapter Four, is the difficulty some participants experienced in using designated technology platforms tools then available at the university in constructing the presentation format for their culminating group projects.

¹³ For an explanation of the administration of Intergroup Dialogue at the University of Maryland, see *Words of Engagement: Intergroup Dialogue*: <http://www.ohrp.umd.edu/WE/index.html>. Unfortunately the online registration system used by the university precluded me from advising students of this requirement before our first class meeting. As a result, I compensated students for their time in intergroup dialogue by adjusting the class workload during that period of the semester.

¹⁴ Students in the fall section were, unfortunately, precluded from participating in the formal university intergroup dialogue program because the time block for the ‘freshman connection’ courses conflicted with the scheduled time for intergroup dialogue meetings. To adjust for this, I included additional in-class dialogic experiences, and added assignments (such as culture jamming) to prompt students in that section of the course to collectively explore and dialogically discuss topics that would have been probed in the formal intergroup dialogue seminar. Extensive narrative feedback about intergroup dialogue from students in the two spring sections of the WAC course has been transcribed; notes are in possession of the author.

¹⁵ Dianne Reeves: <http://www.diannereeves.com>. “Endangered Species” is from her 1993 CD, *Art and Survival*.

Chapter 4: Critiquing Culture, Producing Stories – Student Collaborations in the *Women, Art and Culture* Course

Introduction

Crystallized re/representations of student data in Chapter Three demonstrated that as they shared perceptions about contested issues with one another – hearing stories as well as being heard by their peers – individual participants constructed a greater awareness of the potential of dialogic discussion to democratically benefit all learners, including themselves. Also demonstrated through these crystallized re/representations is the value perceived by participants of the socio-constructivist design in the uses of technologies and in prompting classroom activities to enhance their abilities to interact dialogically with one another. This interpretive analysis, scaffolding re/representations of student texts in Chapter Four, reflects the ways in which students deployed new understandings constructed through exploratory dialogues, as they engaged in a series of higher stakes dialogues and collaborative projects in the final units of study. These projects were intended to prompt students to reflectively and reflexively interrogate hegemonic and alternative narratives about gender and other categories of difference produced in and through visual culture.

Unit Two: Critiquing Culture, Developing Visual Literacy

Students continued to engage dialogically with one another in considering issues of difference as they collaboratively explored gendered representations in visual media. As summarized in figure 19, below, these tasks were designed to prompt them in developing and refining tools of visual analysis. Many of these tasks were

facilitated by the technology afforded in the teaching theater, including the availability of online resources at each student computer station. Together in small work groups, students reviewed and revised drafts of work completed outside of class, such as the TV and Print ad analysis assignment, portions of which were subsequently presented to the entire class by each work group.

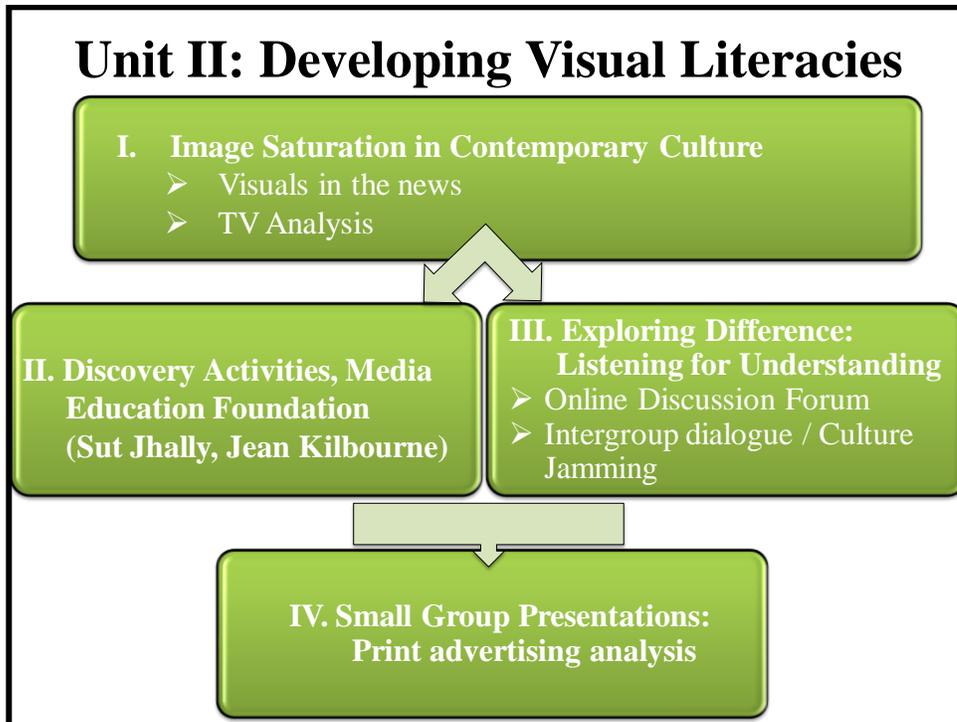


Figure 19: Unit II – Developing Visual Literacies

Discursive Voices: Gender and Media Online Discussion Forum

Although students perceived all assignments in Unit II to have been both engaging and effective, the assignment selected for inclusion, below consistently received the highest marks in student feedback. Student texts constructed for this assignment, which was an extended and non-synchronous online discussion forum, produced narratives demonstrating their collective development in addressing

contested issues with one another as they drew on previous classroom learning transactions. In preparation for the discussion forum, students analyzed gender representations in print and video advertisements, as well as in television shows. They completed readings, and viewed non-print media from the Media Education Foundation, including “Killing Us Softly 3” by Jean Kilbourne (2000). Their initial one-sentence reactions to these assignments, a sampling of which are excerpted below, were shared in class to open a large group discussion, and to provide a baseline of sorts for the online forum to follow.

- Ads are constructed as works of art, but at the same time they are a trivialization of sex
- Our culture = obsession with the perfect body; these ads create a desire to consume
- Kilbourne uses over-dramatic arguments but she does show the shallow values of the media
- I don't think most people don't find these images disturbing ???
- I wonder what most people think?
- I notice that men in these ads seem to have less to lose in terms of being manipulated
- I don't think the messages to teens are good
- I don't feel like a victim when I view ads
- The gender messages to children are especially disturbing
- Sexy women in ads = violence?? I don't think so.
- Some examples Kilbourne and Jhally used are very blatant and not very common
- It is creepy to realize that a lot of women are influenced to get plastic surgery, breast implants etc. from watching advertising.
- Is it the fault of the media or the public? How to change it? Is it even possible? Do we need to change it?
- Women are viewed as weak, powerless, submissive
- Women do have some power in this process – power to shop
- What about men in ads? Not as serious, but men are objectified.
- Male objectification is different from female objectification
- Why are Kilbourne's and Jhally's arguments persuasive to some and not to others?
- What would someone from outer space think about the roles of men and women if they were to see only ads such as these?

Notwithstanding the practice established of a dialogic approach to classroom discourse, the sharply divergent perspectives reflected in the comments above produced a lively and engaged discussion. Students were respectful, but newly unafraid to own perspectives that differed from their peers. They were also keenly interested in hearing arguments from peers to support positions that were different from their own. Beginning with this face-to-face discussion, and continuing with the online forum that followed, students demonstrated deepening understandings of skills and themes germane to performing a critical analysis of difference as constructed through visual culture. As the reader engages texts constructed in this online forum, s/he will note the enthusiasm of students at the opportunity to participate in this discussion. Of particular note, as well, is the degree to which participants dialogically grounded their comments in their own funds of knowledge and lived experiences, yet were prompted to engage in processes of academic “de-centering” as they listened to one another for understanding (Michael Davidson, 2004; Ximena Zuniga, *et al.*, 2007).

Figure 20, below, summarizes the many themes students touched on during this week-long discussion forum. Several themes were discussed in more than one of the three cohort communities. The two topics of women in sports, and women in business were actually discussed in all three cohort groups. Many of these topics had previously been brought up by participants during the stereotype activity in Unit I, and students appeared to welcome the opportunity to revisit and to deepen dialogues concerning these issues. Many of the topics discussed in this forum were also subsequently carried over into small group presentations, such as culture jamming, and the preparation of

women artist bios; a number of topics discussed in the forum served as the focus for culminating group projects. Indeed, all eight of the topics noted below as having been discussed in at least two of the cohorts were the focus of more fully developed critiques in at least one culminating project.

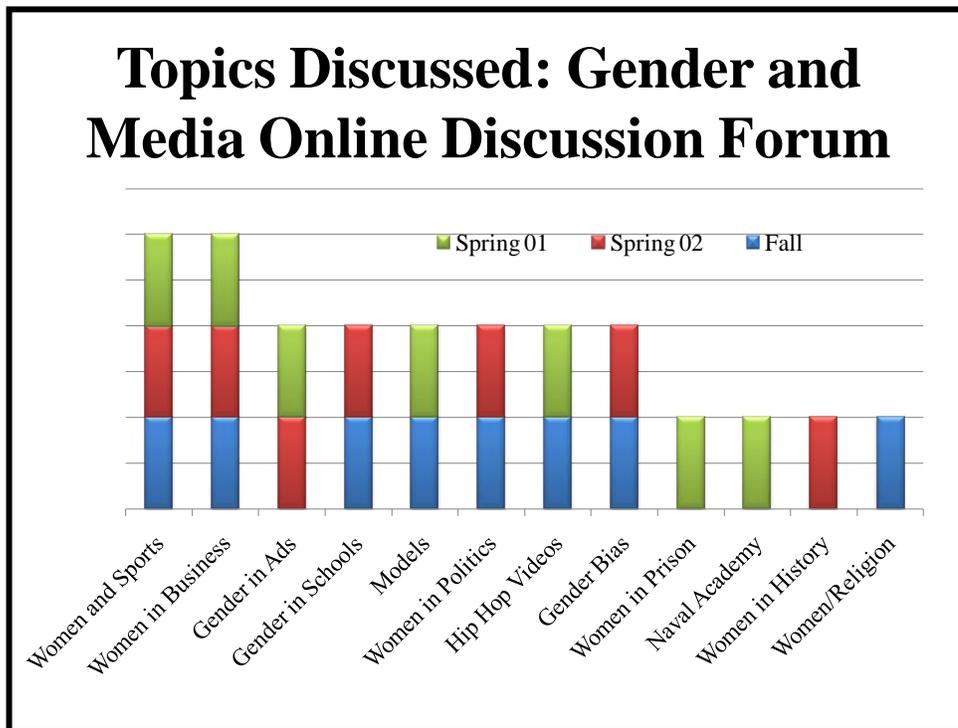


Figure 20: Gender and Media Online Discussion Forum

Extended excerpts from several discussion threads in this forum are re/produced below. These bear careful scrutiny for many reasons, including the degree of openness with which participants engaged in these exchanges, and the variety of complex and contested topics they opted to discuss. Students participated in the discussion forum only with members of their own section cohort, and I have accordingly retained the integrity of these conversations by choosing selectively from among them when more than one cohort engaged in a similar topic of discussion. A

portion of at least one discussion thread from each section cohort is re/produced.¹

While the totality of any single discussion forum is not re/produced, individual student texts are generally re/presented verbatim.

Instructions and Prompt for Online Forum – Media/Gender:

Begin by browsing some of your colleagues' previous online postings to see what they are thinking and writing about. Drawing upon these resources as well as what you have gained from our class discussions, reflect on the ways in which YOU experience the representation and PERFORMANCE of gender in advertising and/or mainstream media (TV/magazines/film...). Your initial posting should be not less than 5 sentences. You should return following our next class session to participate at least twice more in the ongoing conversation. Responses should deepen/add to the conversation by bringing in your own experience and/or class materials that seem pertinent to what others have written. You should remain respectful of your classmates' work and expressed opinions at all times. Rather than simply agreeing or disagreeing, you might ask questions, contribute additional perspectives, or examples.

REMINDER: Gender is not constructed, performed, or experienced in isolation. Each of us experiences our gender in relationship to other aspects of our identities—religion, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, age, class, ability, etc. Contribute your unique perspective and avoid generalizing about gender as if it is experienced in the same way by all members of our class.

As re/produced below, the first thread started by student discussants was about women athletes. With high numbers of both female and male athletes enrolled in each of the sections (a number of whom played on university teams or in club sports), these excerpts about the ways in which representations of athletes are gendered in visual media strikingly illuminate the ways in which students perceived visual culture to have intersected with their own lived experiences. Each of these online conversation threads documents multiple transactions characterized by viscerally-informed learning experiences, and by evidences of differentially-produced consciousness at work in processes of knowledge-making.

Women and Sports in the Media (spring section two)

- One issue I have with media is the way it sometimes portrays women in sport. I feel that media portrays the idea that men are supposed to be more athletic than women. It is often portrayed that sport is a masculine reserve and women are not as strong athletically. When women are portrayed as very athletic, they are often questioned about their sexuality—are they lesbians?? It's as if they are athletic, there is something wrong. Also, female athletes are often portrayed as being sexy. Those athletes with more sex appeal get much more attention. This downplays women's athletic abilities. Many producers do this to draw in viewership and make a profit, just as discussed in class and seen in video clips in class.
- The point you brought up about women being portrayed as less than men in sports was really interesting. I've always noticed that women aren't given as much attention as men, but it somehow never really occurred to me as an issue until you brought it up. I agree with you that it seems like men are portrayed as better athletes by the media even though women may play just as well as the men. I just wanted to point out a similar issue dealing with the media and publicity. Take for example, our own basketball teams. There's so much publicity given to the men's basketball team that it seems like they are the only team that represents Maryland Basketball. I mean, whenever people say "hey, I'm going to the game this weekend", it's pretty much assumed that they are talking about the men's team. Very rarely would you hear someone say, "I'm going to the women's basketball game". Even though the women's team is doing fairly well this season, the athletes are still not given the same publicity as the men. You're absolutely right that there needs to be more appreciation and respect for women athletes.
- In response to comments on how women are portrayed in the media: we can see the different gender portrayals on our very own campus. There are often articles and editorials in the Diamondback about the lack of fans at the women's basketball games. Just recently, the women's head coach sent an email to students asking for their attendance and support, something that the men's team never has to worry about. I think it is important for the Diamondback to continue to show women athletes in a positive light. This is one way that the media is working to challenge gender norms, by showing readers that women can and are doing things that are typically labeled as a male activity. It gets people thinking, which is the first start in changing anything.
- I agree with the fact that society does construct many of their social media around men and sex. I believe one reason why women athletes

must be portrayed as sexy is to get more media attention and time. Despite all the efforts made by females and Title IX to create equality in sports, I am still very prejudiced against female athletes.

- And just to add to the whole women athletes have to appear sexy to get the attention of men thing, I find it to be very true. I was on face book the other day and I saw a picture of Serena Williams as a male profile picture. The thing is Serena was in a g-string ONLY. She was showing everything. Now why did she have to depict herself that way? Was she trying to stoop down to a certain level to be able to be noticed by men? I think the answer to that is yes. I mean Serena has a good reputation but she all of a sudden is being talked about more. I think this is because she has changed her style of dressing. She now dresses more revealing in tight and revealing clothing. I think she is doing this to kind of prove a point to the men that she can be sexy too. Personally, I think her new look is nasty, she looks horrible. Hope I don't offend anyone; it's just my opinion.
- I definitely agree that female athletes are forced to portray a “sexy image” in order to get attention of men. For example, when the Williams sisters first appeared on national television, they did not have a very appealing look and most people viewed them as very unattractive women. However, after being influenced by society and its definition of beauty, they began to conform to the worldly standards and portray a sexier image.
- I agree with you that it is hard for women in sports. Last year when I attended Ball State University I played division 1 Field Hockey and there I experienced several stereotypes about my sexuality. Someone even thought I was a lesbian because I played field hockey and choose to wear sweatpants to school. Not that it's a bad thing; it's just a weird thing to assume.
- Touching on the topic of women in sports, I feel that women are looked down upon in the athletic arena, in part, because men are forced to deal with women in sports. For instance, there is some resentment due to title 9. These women's sports do not have the same crowd draw that men's sports do, so when a college is asked to cut a profitable men's team for a less popular women's team there is going to be some backlash. I think that this resentment has driven a wedge, and not allowed men to appreciate women's sports naturally; rather, in most cases, the exposure to women's sports has been forced upon them.
- Hi! I read what you wrote about women in sports and want you to know that I respect your opinions and am also troubled by the lack of

information or positive attention to women's sports. I realize that a lot of people have responded to you and I understand how people are upset by the lack of media attention given to women's athletes. While I wish this was not the case, I often wonder if this is really something that can/should be fixed. First of all it is important to recognize the fact that same does not always mean equal. Even if women are given the exact same amount of media attention or money or resources this does not mean that it will necessarily be fair. Perhaps women really are more talented in a sport which men are not. I think that women should be given equal resources however I do not expect that that is what will make it 'fair'. Also if people generally are not interested in women's sports, should we be doing something to change that? Yes, it is an unfortunate product of our society; however if someone finds a women's basketball game to be boring, should we be pressuring them to like it just so it seems as though they like women's and men's sports equally. I don't think that we can change societal views like that. I think we should use more constructive ways.

Notably evident in the discussion thread above and in those that follow is a high degree of baseline comfort engaging in an extended discussion, even around contested issues. Students' abilities to successfully participate were partially developed through technology-facilitated dialogues exploring controversial positions on these issues in the first unit of study. However, also at play here is the social presence of the virtual discussion space. This format permitted participants to narrate stories about their own lived experiences that many would have been unwilling to share during an in-class discussion (particularly when they had only been meeting together for less than a month). The significance of having constructed a shared repository of story about course themes through this online dialogue was also notable in collaborative work throughout the continuation of the course. In the excerpt of the discussion thread about advertising re/produced below, students similarly drew both

on lived experience and new knowledges about visual representations from class activities.

Gender Norms in Advertising Media (spring section one)

- I have found that social and cultural gender norms are reflected in advertising in media quite often. They are generally focused around males being stronger and more independent; and around females being more compromised and always seeming weaker or secondary to males. I think that these media representations work by appealing to certain target audiences and sending very simple yet positive messages to those audiences. For instance the image of girls in provocative clothing and in sexual positions during an advertisement for beer is attempting to appeal to straight men that like beer. This image is sending a message that is along the lines of “hey... drink our beer and you’ll attract girls like these.” This message intrigues me because although I’m sure many guys like to drink and get gorgeous girls to be in provocative clothing and in sexual positions this has nothing to do with what kind of beer they drink. I could be wrong, but in my experience and the experience of many of my close friends the brand of beer a guy drinks does not attract or turn me away from him. I have never thought “Oh... he’s drinking Miller Light... I should talk to him... that’s sexy.” Other than the fact that some guys may like both – women and beer, I don’t really see where this connection has come from. Is it just used as an attention grabber or is there more to it?
- In response to the comment that social and cultural norms are widely portrayed in the media, I strongly agree that there is a level of discrimination in the media when it comes to gender representation. Women are most often portrayed as objects rather than individuals, where as men on the other hand, are most often portrayed as heroes and noble citizens. This is a problem because it promotes a derogatory stigma about women in general and perpetuates negative feelings about women. Women must begin to reject the social norms that are presented to them and combat these negative influences by using a more positive and effective tool, and that is education.
- I notice social gender norms being reflected in the media by the way women are always being shown as soft and never strong and powerful. Every time I turn on the television, women are always showing their bodies and men are always looking at the women. Women are supposed to entertain men with their bodies and wit; women are supposed to cater to men’s every need and never to their own. Media works to construct

and constrain gender roles in many ways. It constructs how women are supposed to look ideally and men, too. This ideal image is impossible though, with all the editing and pieces that the advertisements put together. At first, I used to try to look like people on magazines, but then after realizing that I can never look like these images I saw, I just accepted how I look and just hope to continue to have this mind frame. Sometimes I forget that these images are not real and say, "O, I wish I had that or I looked like that." But then I remember that it's not always about how you look or what you have, it's about what you have to offer to the world and to others around you. It's about what's in your mind and soul. Mainstream media never shows this side of the roles that men or women have; they always show the physical part, like that's the most important. I try very hard not to let mainstream images say who I am or am not because I will be damned if I am rejected in a society who tells us that one's body is all people have to offer.

- That is a really good attitude to have. I know that I would like to say that I do not feel pressured by the media, but honestly, I do. I know I tell myself, "wow, she is so pretty, I wish I had her eyes, her hair, her legs," I also think, "she must be so happy, it must be great to look like her, I bet she has a gorgeous boyfriend." Many times I cannot pull myself away from that impossible idea of trying to look like a movie star. It is great to have the more realistic attitude that these people are air brushed, primped, and enhanced via the computer. I also think there is much more pressure in the media for women to be specifically skinny rather than men.
- I agree with what everyone is saying. Images in the media try and make us wish that we were different or "better" so to speak. We see images of women with flawless skin, beautiful hair, and gorgeous figures. These images make some women feel bad about themselves. Sometimes I find myself saying "Damn, I should workout so I could look like that," but at the end of the day you have to realize that you should want to look better only if it will make you feel better and not because that's what society tells you to do.
- Our society and the media are so intertwined that I don't think you can talk about one without the other. The media portrays society and society mimics the media. I do not know which one comes first the media or society...they are so close it's hard to distinguish between the two. Media affects every aspect of my life from when I wake up in the morning and put on my probably name brand clothes to my teeth whitening toothpaste to achieve my 'sparkling' smile, and throughout the day even when I use my five star notebook. But women in the

media are a whole other level in the story. However, it's extremely hard to ignore and change your views on things. After you realize it's there what's next?

- I agree that media and society are very much intertwined. I too, wake up every morning and use my whitening mouthwash. Society has taught me that a white smile is pretty. We have also touched on the issue of name brand clothing. Companies like Abercrombie & Fitch market their models in a way that they all look so pretty and sexy. Additionally, they always look like they are having fun and have no worries in their life—they are always with a good looking man or woman and are always posed in a happy position, either a party scene or sexual pleasure scene. Who wouldn't want to live in this ideal world? Of course people are going to buy their clothes because society gets the impression that you will always look hot and get what you want when you dress like these models. Additionally, companies like this promote certain looks. For example, one shirt reads "I had a nightmare that I was a brunette." I would like to know what's wrong with being a brunette. Personally, this shirt turned me away from their products. I am a brunette.
- I think this is a valid point, especially the slogans on t-shirts from Abercrombie and Fitch. This is another form of media that is gendering the sexes. I read an article a while ago about a "Girlcott" against the store because of its offensive t-shirts. Slogans such as "Who Needs Brains When You Have These" were pulled from the shelves, but further exemplify how companies are debasing women. Abercrombie and Fitch has also targeted and offended various races and ethnicities. Many Asian Americans protested against insulting t-shirts aimed at their ethnicity. Why do companies feel the need to constantly push the limits when it means several different types of people are hurt/insulted as a result? People who wear these t-shirts should realize the negative message they are supporting and that by doing so they are perpetuating the attack against others.

As evidenced in re/presentations of texts constructed in these online discussions, students worked to be genuine, candid, and open to contestation about controversial positions while remaining respectful of the right of their peers to disagree. Explicitly evident both in threads re/produced above, and in those which follow, are instances in which these online contestations prompted highly visceral

reactions. These reactions motivated students to think reflectively in new directions as they worked to articulate their implicit and previously unexamined assumptions about gender and media.

Excerpts from discussion threads on gender in higher education, and on the performance of black women as dancers in music videos complete the re/representations of student narratives from this online forum. Of particular salience to the discussion thread of black women in music videos is the fact that both Black women and Black men students were present in particularly high numbers in this particular cohort section. As indicated in the graph in Chapter Three, together they collectively constituted a major minority status of approximately 40 percent – roughly equal to the percentage of Caucasian students, who were largely female. Many of the discussants whose voices are represented below are Black females. Indeed, it is my strong suspicion that without this degree of representation of this particular group of embodied learners, the discussion would not have taken place. Black women in this cohort section were also those involved in constructing a final group project to critique existing discourses around this discussion topic, and to theorize new alternative discursive possibilities for grappling with it.

Gender and College Enrollment (fall)

- I am taking an education policy class currently and one of the issues that has been brought up is the large gap between male and female enrollment in four year universities. This is not simply due to there being more women in the world than men because the gap is much larger. I wonder if women are pushed harder in school and by their parents?

- I think that fact that less men go to college, but end up advancing farther in the workplace, is indicative of the sexist workplace. And when corrected for factors such as age and education, women earn less than 70 cents to the dollar when compared to men. There are still CEOs like eBay's Meg Whitman and HP's Carly Fiorina, but for the most part there is clear discrimination in the workplace. Women, even when they go to college, are not pushed as much as men to succeed and prosper in the workplace.

Black Women in Music Videos (spring section two)

- The hip hop music industry today is filled with thousands of sexual images. These images are used to appeal to a hungry audience that has been conditioned to associate power, wealth, and fame with scantily clad women. These women, particularly of African-American descent, are most often portrayed as trophies or symbols of status, rather than mothers, wives, or professionals. They are often displayed in a very sexual manner, promoting harmful stereotypes and unhealthy lifestyles. However, their choice to allow themselves to be depicted in this negative, sexual way has far reaching consequences beyond the scope of the three minute video in which they are featured. My question is: why do black women allow themselves to be degraded and exploited when women in general have fought so hard to be recognized in modern-day society?
- I always associate the rap videos with girls dancing around clad in very few strands of string. I agree with you that it creates harmful stereotypes and unhealthy lifestyles. I don't think that many of these women intend to do that. I would assume that many of these women are not able to get a job that pays them as well as a job dancing. Also, the job is a good way to get them recognition. Other companies will see them and maybe this will lead to another dancing job or a job modeling. Furthermore, some of the women may do it just for the fame. They will be looked at by the whole country and gawked at. Some women like that kind of attention. Finally, they would also get to meet the big rap stars, which could be an added bonus.
- I agree with you and your question was once my question. Why do these women allow themselves to be depicted in such ways? Well after much thought, I think I found an answer. Today, most people focus on money, wealth, material goods and fame. All the women in these music videos are old enough to know what they are doing. It was their decision to be in the position they are in. I feel as though most African American women allow themselves to be degraded in this manner because they hold money over respect. I feel as though these women are in these music videos just to be noticed and just for the money. I don't think these women are purposely

forgetting about how women struggle in the world today but they just feel as though, “Well, if I am making money . . . I’m good.”

- I think this is a very important topic. I have asked myself the same question every time I watch a video in which I see young black women portraying themselves in such negative ways. I think it has to do with the fact that many of them may have low self esteem and feel that the only way that men will pay them attention is if they are half naked and doing things to degrade themselves. While some women in videos can be sexy, yet classy, the majority of them look like hoes. I have a problem with the fact that these women allow men to disrespect them and in doing so they are showing that they have no self respect. The real issue lies in the fact that young girls see these images and feel as if this is the way that they should act in order to attract the right guys.
- I like the question of why do black women allow themselves to be degraded and exploited [through the making of music videos]? I think the article of clothing and the sexual dance movements are to give audience a kind of sexual entertainment because, “sex sells.” The more skin that is revealed, the more the audience would like to continue to watch it. Furthermore, I think part of their intentions is to promote the culture of minorities. This happens not only in black music videos; women who reveal partial nudity also appear in Hispanic music videos, and in some white music videos. I think a lot of these issues have to do with what is the ideal lifestyle to many cultures? What does a culture want in an ideal successful life? Some may say money, power; others may say a house or family. The music videos and music only portray a certain lifestyle that a population from a culture wants, however it doesn’t represent the whole majority. If country music were intended for black or Hispanic audiences, I bet none of the dancers/women would be interpreted as sexual objects.

Many students subsequently singled out these online discussions as the most affectively engaging learning experience in the *Women, Art and Culture* course. From my own observation, I noted that following their online dialogues, many students exhibited increased reflexivity in subsequent in-class learning transactions. Participant feedback about the online forum also corroborated my observation that after the sharing of these keenly felt virtual narratives, many students found their collaborative learning partnerships to be more rewarding transactions than had been their

experiences of collaborations in previous courses. The range of knowledge-making negotiations activated in their online transactions also materially contributed to students' sharpened capabilities in the production of critical analyses of visual media. Moreover, students expressed a new appreciation for the sharing of story as a valued element of the learning process. Students were explicitly prompted to build on their conviction about the value of shared personal narratives in exploring the production of alternative cultural knowledges as they next engaged the work of women artists.

Unit Three: Embodied Stories – Women as Producers of Visual Culture

Student one: I wanted to talk about the focus on art in your class and I think it's really different because one of my friends took a WMST class before me and she wasn't doing the same stuff that we were at all. She did have a lot of collaborative projects and a final project that was really cool like we did but it was the focus on art that attracted me to sign up for the class in the first place. I think it opened my eyes a lot more to women artists and to how women are so underrepresented in big museums and it was really interesting to me and I learned a lot from that aspect.

Student two: I agree – I wasn't really into art before – it just opened up my eyes.

—Students, *Women, Art, and Culture*, focus group (2007)

Unit Three focused on women as producers of visual culture; a graphic summary of tasks is provided in figure 21, below. As noted by students in the focus group conversation above, learner transactions in this unit – exploring alternative narratives about gender and embodiment as constructed in the work of women artists – were perceived by many students to have been more engaging than they had anticipated. Two assignments in this unit, (a) group presentations on women artists, and (b) body mapping, were among those most frequently highlighted by learners as

having prompted significant and rewarding processes of learner engagement. Texts constructed by students in conjunction with these two assignments are interpretively re/represented below. As groups made presentations on the work of specific women artists, students also began to construct body maps. This assignment provided them opportunities to create and share their own visual narratives of embodied subjectivity. Student texts from the body map assignment indicate that as they worked in producing their own visual objects, their work materially substantiated for them the significance of the empowering subjectivity they discovered in the lives and cultural production of the women artists whose work they collaboratively explored.

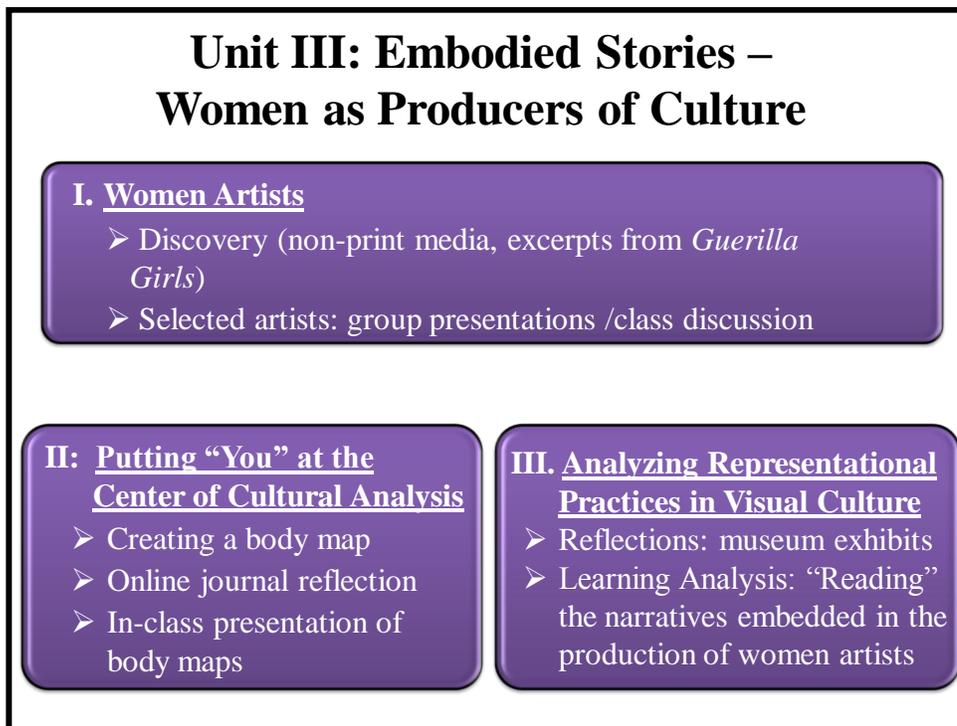


Figure 21: Embodied Stories – Women as Producers of Culture

Women Artists

Although the majority of students taking the *Women, Art, and Culture* course had little, if any, previous experience in studying art, particularly the work of women artists, each student participated in a small group presentation investigating the work of a contemporary woman artist. In the 2006 WAC courses, I moderated class discussions on the work of the following artists: Sokari Douglas Camp, Claudia DeMonte, Artemisia Gentileschi, Rhodessa Jones, Yun Suknam, and Alma Thomas. Visual artists whose work was the focus of student-moderated presentations in the 2006 courses were Judith Baca, Judy Chicago, Frida Kahlo, Hung Liu, Faith Ringgold, Georgia O'Keefe, and Bettye and Alison Saar.

Group members subsequently collaborated to moderate a class discussion about the work of the artist.² At the conclusion of all of the group presentations, students submitted a reflective journal entry providing a snapshot summary of the new understandings they had co-constructed about women artists. The descriptive word choices they used to frame their journal observations were then shared as a prompt to an in-class discussion. Their descriptive word choices, and the frequency with which students selected similar word choices are depicted in figure 22; accompanying journal excerpts are selectively re/represented below.

<p>One word journal: Choose one word or phrase to sum up your knowledge of women artists as discussed in class up to this point. The choice of the word is not as important as the explanatory paragraph you will write to explain your choice. Please write a paragraph of at least 3-5 sentences to explain your choice, using details as you can recall from class discussion or assigned readings. Conclude your word journal with any questions you might have about women artists.</p>
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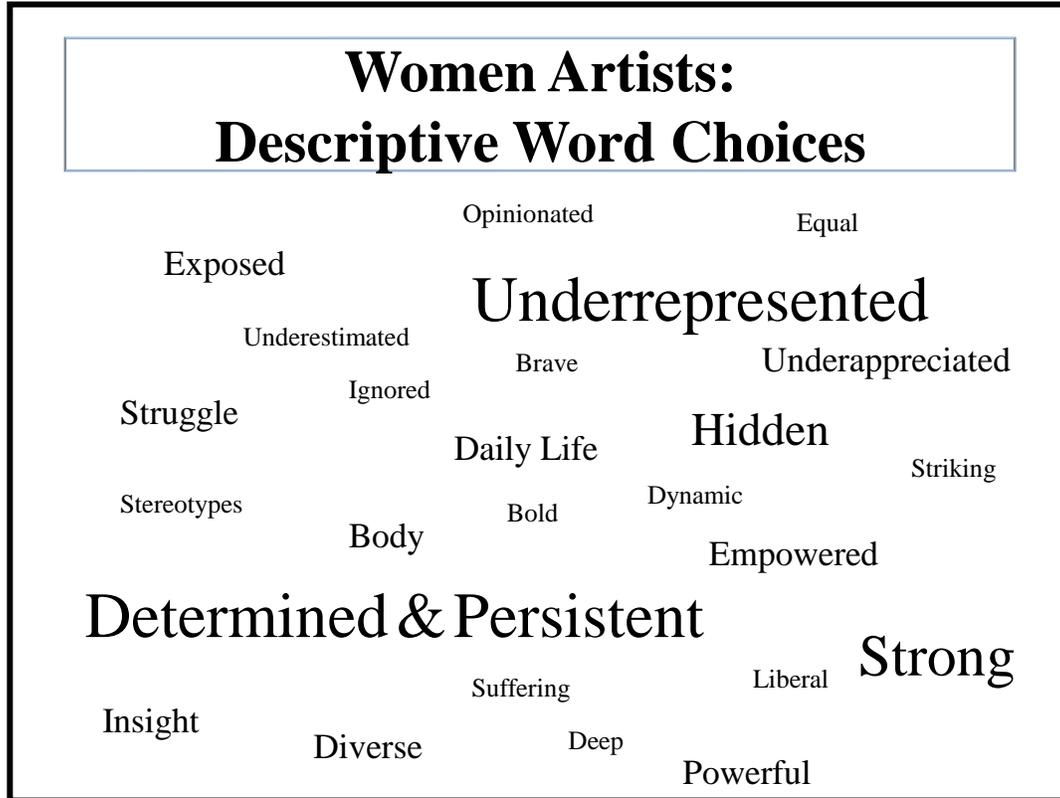


Figure 22: Women Artists – Descriptive Word Choices

Selectively representative responses:

- I have chosen the word **hidden** to describe women artists because I feel as though through decades of hard work, women still do not get recognized in society for many things, art being the most hidden. I believe there are many great women artists out there, but they are not appreciated and given credit for their excellent work and skills. The society needs to embrace these women and acknowledge them because they have a lot of potential and are capable of doing so much and bringing positive change.
- I chose the word **brave** because women artists have had to struggle so much to be acknowledged and admired, and they still have to today!
- Many of the women and women’s works studied this semester have been **bold**. The Vagina Monologues is a jarring work. The Guerrilla Girls use surprising masks to emphasize their message. All these women have a sense of bravery, and this is shared by many artists who are female. I do appreciate the diversity of the women artists we have learned about. **Question: Do all women artists have to be feminists?**

- I chose **body** because in so many works of art, women's bodies are emphasized. I think that society sees women's bodies as the most important thing that females contribute to the world; because of this extreme emphasis many women artists choose to represent it in their own way in their art.
- So much of the art we have analyzed has had such **profound** meaning to not only the artist, but also to anyone knowledgeable about their life. Since much of women's art tends to depict the struggle associated with being female and an artist, true appreciation of their artwork comes from understanding of the artists' life and their struggles. Agreed both men and women artists represent their life through their work, but women do so often very subtly because while their lips are often silenced, their pens and paint brushes have infinite possibilities.
- I chose **underrepresented** because, as we read in the Guerrilla Girls, art historians tend to ignore women artists and their work. Additionally, because society was so male-oriented, women could not get credit for their work, or it would be considered inferior. Most importantly, women's art is still underrepresented today in our art galleries. They are **ignored** and not called artists – they're called "women" artists.
- In the past several classes, I've learned about so much art created by women that I never even knew existed. Even though women are getting more recognition for their art now than they have in the past, I feel that society has yet to fully accept women's art as equally valuable and beautiful to that of men's art. In the readings from the Guerilla Girls, we learned about how women would sign a man's name to their work, or simply initial it so that their gender was ambiguous. Women artists today are still **under-represented** and under-appreciated by society.
- Through the class readings and lectures it has become clear to me that women in art are **underrepresented**. They are equally talented to men, but not equally showcased and this really bothers me. Even good women artist are considered out of the norm and the exception to the rule, not just great artists.
- Women artists are never treated with the respect they deserve. It has taken them a lot of determination to pick themselves up every time they came across a barrier in the art world like not being in museums, or not getting paid as much. Their **determination** brings them closer to their goals.
- I have learned that there are many **stereotypes** for women in society today. Women are expected to be less than men and, and supposed to take care of their household. This is a stereotype that needs to be challenged and women artists are doing so.

- I chose **powerful** because these women made an impact on society. Their achievements were acknowledged by the public and they have been role models for other women. These women artists have courage which has led them to power and success.
- Female artists have had to overcome a number of barriers just to learn about art, create art, and be considered as artists. If these women had just given up once they reach their first couple of barriers, there would be no women's art. It took **determination** and **persistence** on the part of these women just so that this movement would still be alive and growing.
- I believe that women artists exemplify tremendous **strength** and are very **persistent**. They have made a name for themselves through their hard work and diligence. Women like Augusta Savage and Alma Thomas are examples of strong women with a distinct purpose in life.

As demonstrated through their entries above, students experienced critical growth in their abilities to responsively hear and process alternative stories produced in the work of women artists. While many students had initially found the alternative narratives about embodiment and difference constructed in the cultural production of many women artists, to be disturbingly aggressive in their challenges of dominant narratives, their critical engagement with the work of women artists was materially strengthened by the constructivist nature of their transactions in working on women artists together, and in simultaneously producing body maps.

Discursive Constructions: Body Mapping

Texts from the body map assignment, interpretively re/represented below, indicate that students transferred a host of new understandings about women, art, and cultural production from their engagement with the work of women artists into their body mapping transactions. What is a body map? Students were curious about this assignment upon seeing it captioned in the syllabus from the first day of class. I first utilized it in the 2005 spring WAC course after learning about body mapping as a

participatory action tool from my colleague, Vivienne Bozalek, at the University of the Western Cape (South Africa).³ As designed for students in the *Women, Art and Culture* course, the body map was a multi-transactional series of assignments in which students produced a draft visual for peer and instructor feedback, shared the finished product in an in-class presentation, and submitted a journal reflection.⁴

The Assignment: BODY MAPPING:⁵ Putting YOU at the Center of Cultural Analysis! Your body map will be a **visual document**. The use of photographs and computer graphics is perfectly acceptable. Points will NOT be assigned on the basis of the professional nature of the work, but rather on the satisfactory completion of the assignment to explore one's own body in the context of its environment and history as prompted below. Unlike the body maps created by women in South African workshops, size is not a requirement – it can be 8 x 10, poster size, or larger. **Components of the body map:** Your body map should represent a compilation of your most significant lived experiences up to the present time. NOTE that the same body aspects might appear as significant in multiple ways – representing both strength and pain, for example. (Students were directed to indicate areas and aspects of their body that represented for them spaces of danger, emotional significance, empowerment, pain, support, and strengths.)

Body mapping was selected by students on exit evaluations as one of the most significantly engaging of their course experiences; only dialogic peer interactions, whether face-to-face or virtual, were ranked more highly by students. Representative comments about the significance of the body map assignment drawn from exit evaluations are noted below:

- I learned about others
- I loved being able to be artistic
- Loved this assignment
- I learned a lot about myself
- Very effective – learned a lot about myself and others
- My favorite project
- Was able to look at myself
- Got to express myself in a fun way
- I love being creative with art – I really loved this assignment
- It made me learn more about myself

- The most effective project

Selected re/representations of body maps along with related student narratives are interpretively re/produced below. Scanned reproductions of body maps are included with participant consent; however, to protect the privacy of research participants, body maps are not paired with individual narrative reflections. Images are included not to *illustrate* any particular narrative, but rather to give a visual sense of the variety and scope of stories told in the body maps produced by students in the WAC course.

Re/representations of these visual objects and their accompanying narratives poignantly illuminate the multi-layered and multi-sensory nature of transactions at work in this assignment prompting students to negotiate new understandings of themselves, their peers, the production of visual culture, and their social worlds at large. For all of these reasons I have re/represented a large sampling of body maps and texts below. Notable in the body maps themselves, as well as in the reflective narratives constructed by students, are visceral markers of the pervasive materiality of these sensory transactions. Their learning praxis is characterized by the striking range of knowledge-making processes simultaneously engaged. Clearly evident, as well, in work constructed by students for this assignment, is the degree to which body mapping provided them unique opportunities to use visual language and narrative together to create and share personal narratives that were authentic and meaningful expansions of both the visual analysis unit, and of their engagement with the work of women artists. As evidenced below, in responding to a journal prompt about connections to their

previous learning transactions, many students made direct connections with the work of women artists.

Prompts for the Body Map Journal Reflection: (1) What worked well for you in this assignment? What didn't? (2) What was the most significant learning aspect of this assignment for you? (3) To what other course experience or material does it seem most closely connected? Why? (4) Write a text poem of at least five sentences to accompany your body map. Each should begin with the phrase "I am".

Prompt: To what other course experience or material does this seem most closely connected? Why?

The body map seems most closely connected to any of the women artists we studied, especially Judy Baca and Faith Ringgold. They both used their life experiences in creating their art and turned challenges into sources of strength.

I learned that drawing can be a way of expressing emotion, but also a way to truly acknowledge truths about myself. The body map reminds me of Judy Baca and Faith Ringgold because we are expressing ourselves in art. It also reminds me of Dianne Reeves and the way she expressed her feelings and self-image through music.

I think the body map is closely related to the work of Judy Baca and Faith Ringgold. Both artists used visual artwork to show the impact of experiences on people. This is closely connected to the body map because we had to show the result of our experiences visually. In addition, Judy Baca and Faith Ringgold showed the experiences of their cultures in their artwork and we showed the experiences of our own culture through our body map.

I think that this assignment was most closely related to the work we have discussed in class the last few weeks. For example, Judy Baca shares her cultural understanding as a Chicana woman and the struggles she has dealt with throughout the years. She illustrates people and places of danger to her as a Latina in society, but she also shows the people who are her supports, such as her grandmother. Her art is very

I am a woman – self-conscious yet beautiful, curvy
I am a student – struggling yet intelligent, light-bulb brain
I am an artist – confused yet gifted, colorful
I am an athlete – hurting yet building
I am human – suffering yet caring, heart and tears

This assignment was different for me because I don't typically express my opinions through art. I would rather express my opinions on paper or verbally. I enjoyed decorating my body with different colors and identifying areas on my body that have brought me joy and are a sense of pride.

I am comfortable with myself
I am individual
I am able to overcome difficulties
I am respected by my peers
I am strong

I liked this assignment. It was a great learning experience for me. The easiest part for me was writing about areas of emotional significance. As I mentioned in class, the hardest part for me was coming up with areas of empowerment. At this stage of my life, I really don't feel like I have much power over anyone. I am either on an equal basis with my peers or under my professors, parents, coaches, etc. The most significant learning aspect for me was realizing that areas of pain were actually areas of strength in the long run. For example, my surgeries on my leg were definitely a source of pain, but in the end, the whole experience made me stronger. It made me realize that I can overcome obstacles in my life. I think this assignment seems most connected to the Vagina Monologues. I say this because both are a form of art talking about one's self. In the Vagina Monologues, women talked about their own personal experiences, and now in the body map, I am talking about my own life experiences.

Reflected in the production of body maps, and in their accompanying journaling narratives, is a diversity of student experiences as social actors (students, athletes, performers etc.), and in relationships with friends and family members. The

work from the body mapping assignment also reflects many shared themes: gendered, raced, classed, and generational experiences of embodiment resonant with discourses of privilege, oppression, vulnerability and empowerment. Highlighted throughout the re/production of these documents are processes by which participants were differentially prompted to come to grips not only with discursively diverse constructions of gendered and raced representations of embodiment, but also with the challenging nature of previously unexamined relationships between their lived experiences and discursively objectifying representations inscribed in visual culture. Reflections about their creative process illuminate student perceptions that this assignment prompted new ways of envisioning themselves as cultural producers as well as the (sometimes objectified) consumers of it.

I AM terrified of the major threat George W. Bush is to the LGBT Community.

I AM the survivor of two eye surgeries.

I AM very lucky to have such a loving and accepting mother.

I AM known for my ability to voice my beliefs whenever I am approached with adversity.

I AM glad I have only had to deal with the excruciating pain of ovarian cysts rupturing once in my life.

I AM completely accident prone on the volleyball court and never fail to hurt myself the minute I step foot on it.

I AM thankful that my mind has given me the ability to further my education and advance in my employment.

The most significant learning aspect of this assignment for me was figuring out the parts of my body that were sources of strength. I had never thought about how much I valued my hands. I want to be a surgeon therefore, my hands are very important to me. I also realized how important they were to me when I was younger. When you are first born, your eyesight is not that great, so you rely on your hands. Plus, you rely on your hands for many things throughout your life.

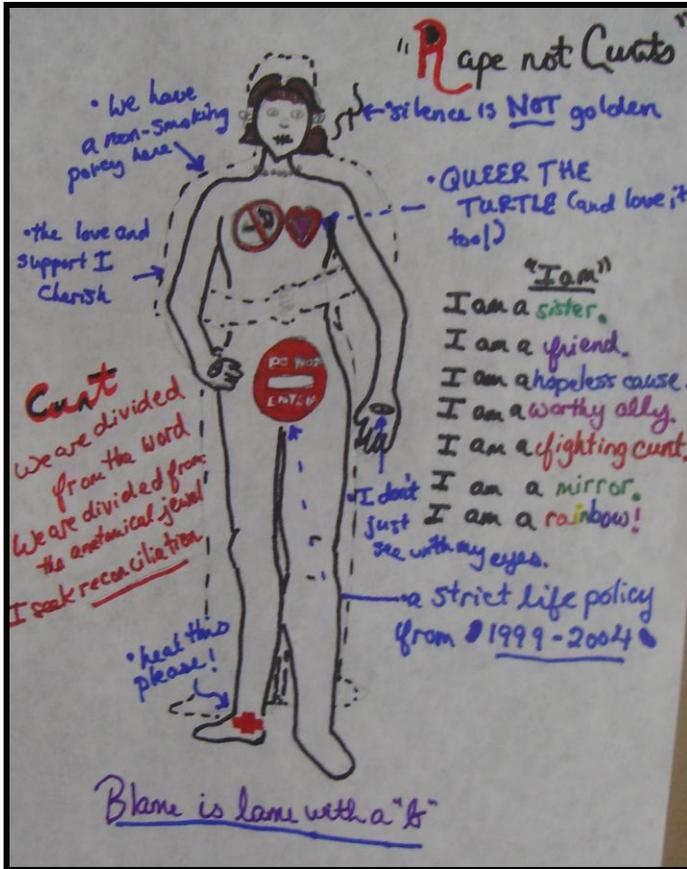


Figure 24: Body Map B

I AM

I AM the spitting image of my mother with my large hips and thighs.

I AM self conscious of my skin and freckles because I am too pale.

I AM a red head, which makes me unique and reflects my heritage.

I AM afraid of cancer, it has taken away two of the closest people in my life.

I AM intelligent and witty, and I love to smile and laugh

Before doing this assignment I didn't realize how much different areas of my body meant to me. I realized that many parts of my body have a connection to my family and I would never want to change that. This assignment is closely related to an African-American studies class that I have taken. In my AASP class we were also asked to reflect on ourselves and how different aspects of our life have affected the people we are today.

I am calm under pressure
I am afraid of dark, deep water
I am from the field of dreams
I am interracial; black and white
I am a “pure shooter”

Even though it was rewarding to learn insightful things about myself I must say that it wasn't the easiest having people I don't know very well learn about me on a personal level as I was learning about myself at the same time.

I AM nervous and scared,

but I AM stronger than I ever thought I was.
I AM caring and friendly,
but I AM shy and introverted.
In the end, I AM unique.

In this assignment, I was really able to connect the “outside” with the “inside”; usually we think of them as two pretty different things, but this assignment showed that, in some ways, they're the same.

Prompt: What worked well for you in this assignment? What didn't?

I AM funny and loved.
I AM at times lonely.
I AM a strong little person.
I AM stressed out.

What worked well for me in this assignment was the fact that we could talk about personal experiences. I do not usually get to talk about personal experiences and found myself reflecting on things that I have been through and am going through. What did not work for me was that I did not feel comfortable enough telling everything about me on a piece of paper. I would rather talk about it to people I feel comfortable around. The most significant learning aspect of this assignment is that I can see that there's a story behind every individual, no matter who you are or where you're from; and also, that you can learn a lot from yourself and others by constructing a piece of art about your life.

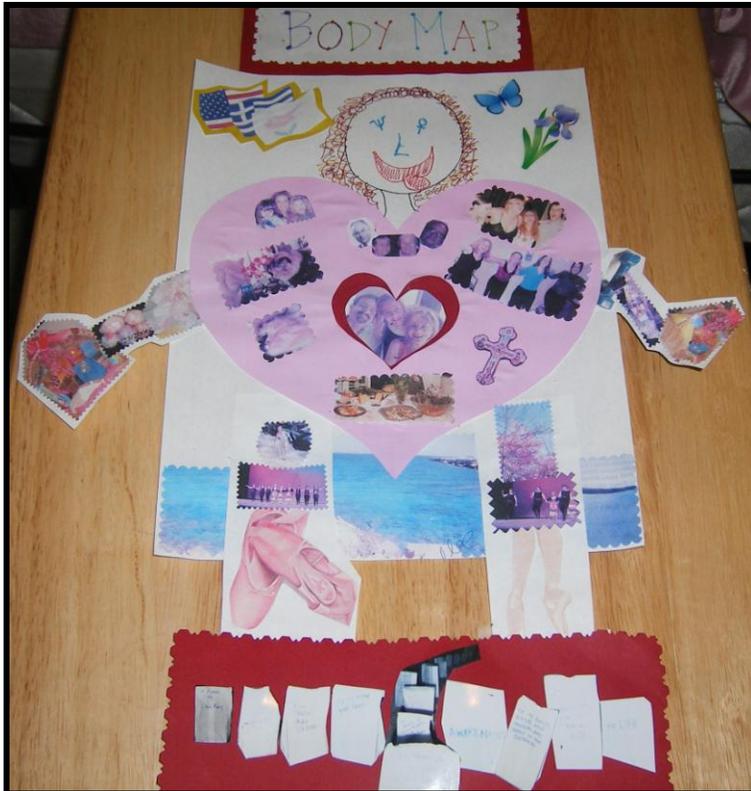


Figure 25: Body Map C

I am optimistic.
I am tall and I love it.
I am not a very good decision maker.
I am proud of my family and my life so far.
I am me, the only person I know how to be.

This assignment it brought back a lot of good memories but it also touched some deep feelings that were haunting at times.



Figure 26: Body Map D

I Am a BLACK EDUCATED WOMAN
I Am a TRUE AND REAL PERSON WHO SPEAKS MY MIND NO
MATTER WHO I OFFEND
I Am NOT DEFINED BY MY LOOKS BUT WHO I AM INSIDE
I Am VERY INDEPENDENT AND LOVE KIDS
I Am NOT THE KIND OF PERSON TO ENVY OTHERS BUT TO
CONGRATULATE THEM FOR WHAT THEY ARE AND WHO
THEY WILL BECOME

It was hard to open up myself to share personal aspects of my life like my health history and my love life or the root of my family and all of our problems. A lot of time I don't talk about my experiences with motherhood and my battle with finding myself and turning into the woman I am today. It did allow me to evaluate what eventually led me to go to college and pursue a degree so I could give my kids a better childhood than I had.

I AM

I am a Persian American girl

I am in love with not only my boyfriend but also my friends and family

I am eager to speak up when something is on my mind

I am always looking for the truth in all aspects of living

I am at times afraid of house parties and the way many young teenagers get overly drunk

I am a ballet dancer

I believe that the goodness of the heart can end all suffering in the world.

I loved using my creativity and artistic skills to bring together an image that represents me, my body, and emotional experiences all in one image. The thing that didn't work so well for me in this assignment was attempting to think of the areas of emotional significance and danger that I felt were most important to me. I have had many past experiences that I felt were too personal for me to portray within my body map assignment.

Prompt: What was the most significant learning aspect of this assignment for you?

I am afraid of the dark.

I am incomplete

I am little but nothing can hold me down.

I am ambitious

I am different from you

I am ready.

I learned more about other peoples' heritage and experiences when my group and I exchanged ideas about our maps. I learned to respect other cultures and not to make assumptions. Someone in my group brought up this question: tell us something that we don't know just by looking at you. I think it has been the most interesting topic raised during our discussion.



Figure 27: Body Map E

I AM a good person
I AM Jewish and Hispanic and proud of it
I AM a positive leader
I AM a strong woman
I AM loved and cherish that greatly

The most significant learning aspect for me was personal reflecting. This assignment made me think of my body in ways I have never done before. I learned that I am pretty happy with who I am as a woman and individual. The body map was closely related to my EDCP470 RA class, because it asked us to look at ourselves as individuals who are unique. In RA class we have learned a great deal about the individual and each person's role in community, especially the community here at Maryland.



Figure 28: Body Map F

- I AM a woman.
- I AM a Pakistani.
- I AM proud of my accomplishments.
- I AM a hard-worker.
- I AM a survivor.

The most significant learning aspect of this assignment was that I got a chance to look at my life as a whole, to see things in the past and how I have overcome certain obstacles. I realized that there are a lot of things that have contributed to making me who I am today. Some of those experiences were bad, but they have helped me grow as a person. This assignment seems to be connected very well with my dialogue group. I have learned many things about myself which I can also talk about in my gender dialogue. It has given me the opportunity to reveal myself without even saying a word verbally.

I am a girl

I am a girl whose breasts used to be painful and now
I am a girl whose breasts have become hers and beautiful
I am a girl who worries that her small body will make her a target
I am a girl who won't let her worry become her
I am girl who values her voice as her strength because sometimes her
body doesn't show it
I am a girl who has grown from the love for her mother, father, grammie,
pop-pop, cousin Sarah, and loving boyfriend Jeremy
I am not a girl
I am a woman

Doing the draft first was a really big help for me. The most significant learning aspect of the assignment was realizing how much having larger breasts when I was younger really affected me in a negative way and my self-identity. It seems the most connected to the ad unit because often ads have a lot to do with how someone, especially young girls envision themselves.

Prompt: To what other course experience or material does this seem most closely connected? Why?

I am progressive
I am relaxed
I am persistent
I am opinioned
I am always looking forward.

This project reminds me of the advertising assignment. Like that assignment, we were looking at a visual image (in this case, an image of ourselves instead of a print ad), only in this case we were analyzing ourselves at a deeper level.

I am a Daughter
I am a Sister
I am Loved
I am recovering
I AM Filipino
I am a Feminist
I am happier NOW

My body map is closely related to gender (and racial) representations in the media. The negative attitude I created stemmed from what I saw and interpreted in our society.

I am supported by my family and friends.
I am strong for dealing with Hyperthyroidism.
I am focused on my health, exercise and nutrition.
I am scared of driving after my car accident.
I am comfortable in my own skin.
I am appreciative of my body and my life.

The body map seems most closely connected to the overall theme of the course, which is to appreciate and learn about how women, art and culture are interconnected. I think that this assignment ties specifically into our analysis of the media because our body maps show real and genuine life stories, whereas the media is often simply showing sex appeal. This assignment showed me that as a woman, I shouldn't be focused on the media and the images they portray, but instead focus on how my own body makes me unique and how my culture makes me who I am.

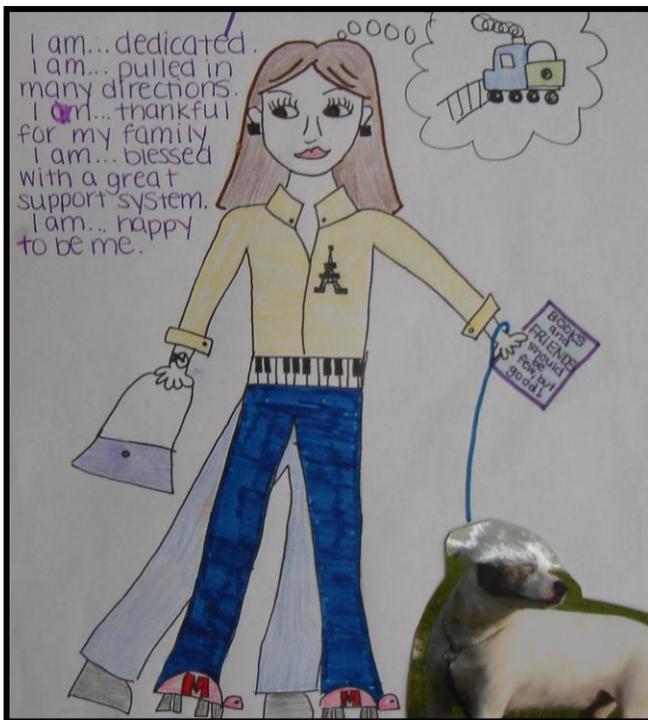


Figure 29: Body Map G

I AM Poem.
I am S. (name withheld)

I am a performer.
I am clumsy, very clumsy.
I am intelligent.
I am a singer.
I am a woman.
I am a girl with amazing friends and family.
I am a woman who is very close to her mom.
I am a girl who always gets butterflies.
I am in love with being on stage.
I am a girl with a big heart.

This assignment was very interesting because it was all about me. I didn't have to look anywhere else for the answers. The answers came from me. It is related to all the women we have studied, especially Dianne Reeves, Judy Baca and the women of Sweet Honey in the Rock. They show who they are through their music and their art. We showed who we are through our maps. It is also related to body image and how we see ourselves as women, students, individuals, and people.

The Body Map: Exit Reflections

The following comments were submitted by those students who indicated on open-ended exit evaluations that the body map assignment was their most significant course learning experience. Having made that selection, they were then asked to comment on what particular aspect of the assignment had been the most powerful.

- How my life experiences have impacted me
- How my life experiences shape how people see me and vice versa
- Importance of culture in who I am
- Importance of my family background in who I am
- I didn't realize how easy I have it compared to others
- How important my body is to me, to who I am
- I need to become stronger
- I can look to myself as a source of learning
- Visual expression as a way to express truth
- The group sharing was very powerful
- My body as well as my emotions and feelings impact who I am
- This assignment gave me a powerful way to connect the inside of me with the outside
- I learned to push myself creatively
- I learned more about my weaknesses and strengths

- The impact of my body on how I feel about myself
- My body as a source of empowerment
- We all have stories behind us – we can learn about self and others through our stories
- How much of what we carry, negative and positive, affects our dealings with others
- Being honest with myself and realizing I have nothing to be ashamed of
- Pain can become a source of strength and power
- Gendered self knowledge

As evidenced in even these brief excerpts of participant texts above, many (indeed most) student research participants found the materiality of the body map assignment to have significantly facilitated *affective* transactional learning modalities. Equally evident is the degree to which their affective and multi-sensory engagement with the body map assignment sharpened their ability to articulate and to share with their peers newly experienced understandings of the gendered othering that occurs in representational practices with/in dominant narratives in visual culture. As they perceived and processes these understandings, participants were also prompted to negotiate alternatively transgressive understandings of themselves and their peers as both producers and consumers of culture. These factors, together with the increased degree of cohort intimacy and community cohesiveness that I observed in consequence of the sharing the body maps, were instrumental in scaffolding critical processes of knowledge-making as students began work on their culminating group projects.

Unit Four: Sharing Our Stories – Collaborative Knowledge-Building Projects

As highlighted in the figure below, assignments in the fourth unit were intended to provide scaffolding and support to student work groups in producing projects that critiqued some aspect of contemporary visual culture. After drafting a project proposal, each group received feedback and suggestions from the instructor as well as from peers in different work groups. Following in-class presentations, students received detailed evaluations on their project from their peers and myself. Students subsequently completed a learning analysis reviewing their individual contributions to the group and evaluating the collaborative processes of the group as a whole.

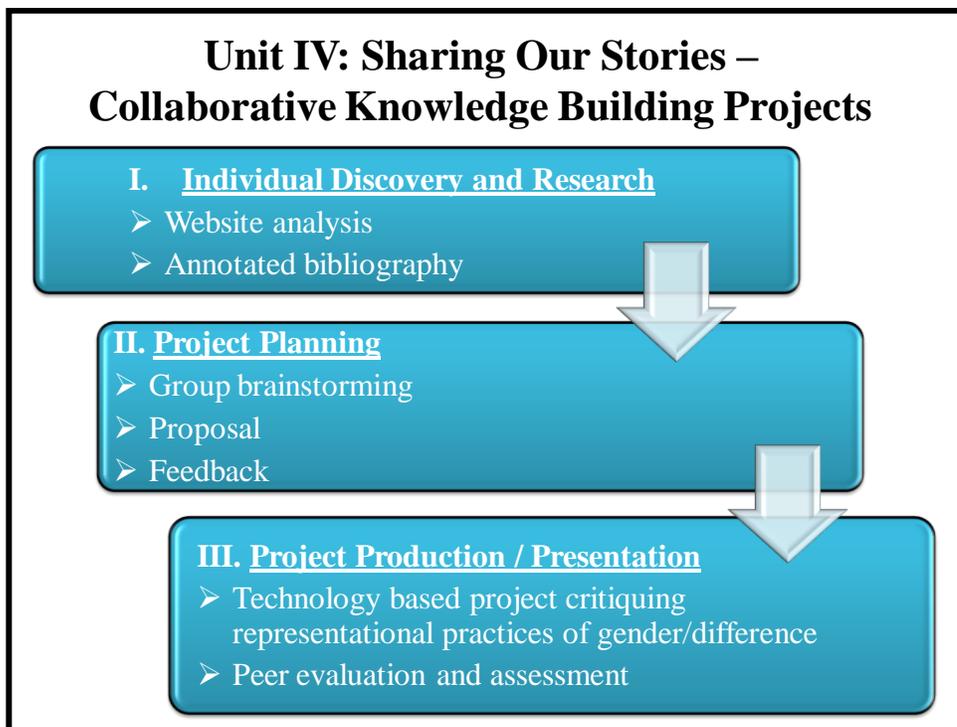


Figure 30: Unit IV: Collaborative Knowledge Building Projects

Culminating Projects

In-class presentations occupied approximately 20 minutes. Each group also posted their project to the online course platform. Projects focused on a topic of choice related to course themes of women, art, and culture. In addition to the draft proposal, and evaluations noted above, project requirements also stipulated the production of a paper document from each group along with an annotated bibliography. Each project was required to include at least one formal analysis of an object of visual culture. Projects in the spring 2006 sections of the WAC course were uploaded to the online course management space in WebCT (a platform no longer in use at the university). As a result, most of these projects (originally produced as power point presentations with embedded sound and hyperlinks) are archived as hard copies in my research files but are no longer accessible online. Creative projects produced by student work groups during the spring semester also included an e-zine and a music video.

While students were uniformly enthusiastic about the content of their projects, and the opportunity to present them to their peers, many in the spring cohorts found the process of producing the project to be a very stressful one, because the technology tools I directed them to use in WebCT were more difficult to adapt to the digitally inter-active nature of projects conceived by students than I had anticipated. After receiving participant feedback, I worked to make available a greater range of digital technologies. In the summer of 2006, I began to use educational wikis, and utilized one as the online course management space for the fall 2006 section of the WAC course. Culminating projects for the fall cohort were posted to this wiki, where they

remain archived. Although students were not very familiar with wikis at the time, they did find the process to be less stressful than had participants who used WebCT in the spring semester. Finding a flexible technology platform, and providing adequate support and training in the use of whatever platform is adopted for the posting of digital story culminating projects remain an important consideration in designing and teaching future iterations of this course.

The following table summarizes the topics for culminating projects produced across all three sections cohort sections of the WAC research venue. In some instances, students in different sections produced projects exploring similar topics; the number in parentheses indicates how many projects explored a particular theme.

Final Project Topics	
Eating Disorders	(3)
In-depth Analysis: The Dove Advertising Campaign for <i>Real Beauty</i>	(2)
Influential Women Role Models of the Twentieth Century	
Analyzing Disney (2): Gender and Race; The Mythical Norm	
Reclaiming the Music: Hip Hop Today	
"It's hard out here for a woman" (student-produced music video)	
Empowering Women in Developing Countries	
Racial Stereotypes of American Women in Popular Culture	
Talking Back: Analyzing the Work of Performance Artist Damali Ayo	
Female Athletes: In a League on their Own (e-zine)	
Ad & Media Representations: Targeting Female Adolescent Consumers	

Figure 31: Final Project Topics

The evaluative process for these projects was rigorous, involving rubric-directed peer, self, and instructor assessments. Although all projects were not of uniform quality, evaluations demonstrated that each provided a forum by which participants were prompted to negotiate new understandings about the topic explored. Representative comments from evaluations, excerpted below, provide insight into the pros and cons participants experienced with respect to their learning transactions in culminating projects.

Students Reflections: Project Collaboration

- I liked sharing ideas with others; learned a lot; fun way to learn about self and others
- A pain—different voices, hard to compromise
- Don't prefer this type of work
- Worked well with my partners although usually don't do much of this but liked my partners
- Diversity of opinions makes for a more intellectual conclusion
- A way to learn about myself
- Sometimes confusing as to expectations
- Don't like having big presentations on top of other work
- Technology allows us to be very creative, artistic and visual
- Very interactive way of working together and using technology
- Requirements easy to understand
- I loved those projects because you got to know people in your class better. I made some of my best friends that class basically because you gave us a chance to open up to each other in groups and stuff and talk.

Final Reflections: Learning in the Women, Art, and Culture Course

Students were queried in evaluations at mid-term, and again at the end of the term about activities that they perceived to have supported their learning interactions in the *Women Art, and Culture* course. Figures summarizing this data were included in Chapter Three. Despite the well-documented tendency of participants to exaggerate

perceived benefits in completing academic course evaluations, these self-reported reflections, extracted from evaluations, carry significant weight in my overall research inquiry into participant knowledge-making experiences in the *Women, Art and Culture*. This is this case because they are strongly correlative to my qualitative analysis of empirical data collected from research informants in the completion of course assignments, such as those that have been selectively re/represented in these chapters. In their final evaluations, student reflected on the many ways in which they perceived themselves to have increased their competencies as learners in the *Women, Art and Culture* course. In the representative sampling below, students are frank in assessing the costs of learning processes that are collaborative and constructivist, but they are equally thoughtful about the rewards they experienced as they engaged in these transformative and transgressive processes of knowledge-making.

Discursive Voices: Final Evaluations

- My eyes have been opened to much more than I ever thought and I have a new hunger to learn more.
- I learned a lot about myself, which surprised me.
- I loved the course; however sometimes I felt all the little assignments were overwhelming and I wasn't sure what was due when.
- I thought that the workload was a little much for an elective. I already get a lot of work in my major required courses and don't expect to get a lot in an elective course. Compared to other core courses, this class has had more than double the work.
- I found almost everything to be rewarding because everything made me think and opened my mind to things I didn't realize before.
- It was a very intimate setting and I think that was a great way to run a class.
- I enjoyed the out of class trips
- The course was so much better than I could've even imagined. I learned so much about women, art, and culture and gained a deeper appreciation for the subject.
- The workload was a lot, but rewarding as well.

- This course really taught me a lot, but I felt overwhelmed with work, especially at the end of the semester.
- Participating in class was hard. I will work more on it in the future.
- I expected to learn about women's issues and issues regarding race. I did not expect the amount of required work for the course
- Very repetitive work; I felt as if my opinions were wrong if not in agreement with the professor.
- Dialogue was a good experience but I don't think it should be required.
- Loved EDPL 338 (dialogue)—thank you for requiring it!
- Thank you for letting us know about intergroup dialogue. Loved it and will sign up for more.

Of most significance in this analysis, corroborating correlations between student work, and their perception of their learning engagement, is the finding that high levels of student satisfaction with their course experiences contributed to high levels of learner engagement. These transactions, in turn, empowered participants to experience deepened understandings of visual culture, and sharpened abilities to collaboratively navigate competing visual representations of difference in contemporary media culture. As a result of their engagement in this constructivist learning praxis, they were enabled to co-construct alternative new knowledges.

These findings are also well supported in voluntary focus group conversations with students that were convened after the conclusion of the course.⁶ The narrative re/produced below was excerpted from a conversation in which participants collectively reflected on what they had taken away from the course – ideas, assignments, activities – and on what had prompted significant learning transactions. Their comments are interpenetrated with their recognition of having been satisfyingly and productively engaged in the iterative and transformative processes of constructivist learning that are at the core this dissertation project.

Student one: Well it is the difference between talking at someone and talking to someone, you know. It is not just lecturing and giving the readings – it needs to be discussion-based and really inter-active and more creative because it is something that is really present in every aspect of our lives. The one thing I learned from your class is this image of women is everywhere – like in every single picture – it’s just absolutely everywhere, and you only see that by pointing it out with real life examples, not just by doing readings. I mean, readings can help, like the definitions of feminism that we read.

Student two: Exactly! Like the interaction experiences that you gave us; having people *just tell you* isn’t like the real world. And your class gave me confidence like to be proactive, to do it for myself. When you are sitting in a class where the teacher is telling you everything, you aren’t making your own decisions. You can’t think for yourself because teachers think for you, but you let us think for ourselves. You let us think, I mean we knew what you thought too, but then we got to express it for ourselves. You, kind of like, let us sit there and figure it out. You let us make our own decisions and express our own opinions rather than you putting all your opinions on us and us just agreeing, “Oh yea, that’s how it is supposed to be.”

Student one: Also the entire class environment made it easier for us to share our opinions. It helped me build my perspective in other things – it was easy to voice our perspective and also to hear other people’s opinions in our discussions. Like you would share your opinion and then somebody else would share their opinion and then it would make you think about yours and I think that is really important . . . Before I didn’t have a perspective about guys viewing women as sexual objects, and so I didn’t know what to think about things like guys randomly honking at me. But now . . . I have a lot of perspectives to think about.

A selective juxtaposition of student texts from the *Women, Art and Culture* course, interwoven with other interpretive modes of re/representation, has produced glimpses of learning engagement prompted through collaborative and socio-constructivist processes that were technology-enhanced. These glimpses reveal the materiality of the sense-making negotiations with which participant learning transactions are inscribed, and which scaffolded an iterative praxis of critically

reflective and reflexive transformative knowledge-making for all learners. Chapters Five and Six examine similar processes of knowledge-making from the perspectives of women's studies students who came together transnationally in a virtual classroom setting.

Endnotes

¹ Although they are presented below as one seamless discussion, I have differentiated discussions among the section cohorts by including a subtitle with the introduction of each new theme. Shifts in discussion topics occurred organically. As students logged on to the forum during the week, they would decide whether to continue with the topic of discussion underway or to begin a new thread. Students were also able to return to a previous conversational thread. I occasionally participated in the discussion; in most instances I did so merely to reinforce participant awareness that I was following along in the discussion even though I was not actively moderating it. More rarely I felt it would be useful to offer a differently informed perspective if a student may have asserted something as factual that was in fact not supportable. Most of the time, however, students moderated themselves and one another quite effectively without active intervention on my part.

² All members of the class prepared for the discussion about each artist by reading the relevant material from *The Guerrilla Girl Bedtime Companion to History of Western Art*, and/or viewing assigned documentary video footage.

³ Dr. Bozalek was a collaborating academic in the online *Women's Health and Well-Being* course; we had initially hoped to incorporate body mapping into that course but the necessity of having students post digital images of their body maps made it unfeasible given the relatively limited technological resources available to most of the course participants.

⁴ Students were not obligated to share either their narrative reflection or their final body map with anyone but myself. However, and despite some initial uncertainty, only 2 of the 80 participants chose not to share their body map assignment with peers.

⁵ “Participatory Learning Activities” (PLA), such as the construction of body maps, are used extensively in projects that seek to assist groups historically lacking institutional power (such as women or youth), either in developing countries or in depressed areas of more prosperous economies. The goal of using PLA is to initiate the formation of partnerships that will empower participants to challenge oppressive structures, and to create action plans for change. It has also been useful in helping participating individuals to experience a deeper personal awareness of their own relationship to their bodies, and to the resource-poor environments their bodies sometimes inhabit. One example of PLA in South Africa is the use of body mapping to help women suffering with HIV/AIDS to create stories of emotional healing. “Body

Maps is part of the Memory Box Project used in grassroots organizing with HIV-positive people to encourage expression and contemplation of their experience through writing, painting, and other media. The life-size Body Maps tell the artists' own stories through painted representations of wounds, marks and HIV viruses together with textual fragments, areas of emotional significance, and symbols of personal power. Shadow outlines of the partners of participants underline the importance of support and encouragement from others.” <http://fusion.stolaf.edu/news/index.cfm?fuseaction=NewsDetails&id=2468>.

⁶ All focus group conversations have been transcribed; transcriptions in possession of the author.

Chapter 5: Virtual Dialogues – *Women’s Health and Well-Being, Transnational Perspectives*

In particular, I have a greater understanding of how health and well-being are viewed differently in other countries. In Africa, health and well-being is viewed from a survival standpoint as opposed to the U.S., where women are more concerned with self-determination. In general, women’s health and well-being is enhanced when their basic human needs are met and only then can they consider striving for internal self-determination, knowledge, and empowerment. Women’s health and well-being is generally compromised by relative positions of power and subordination. These social and cultural barriers impede women’s opportunities and progress towards self-determination.

— Student, *Women’s Health and Well-Being* (2007)

Introduction

In 2004, as I began to re-conceptualize the *Women, Art, and Culture* course that initially prompted this dissertation research, I was invited to participate in an institute on Feminist Theories and Web-Based Pedagogies at the University of Maryland. The two-week summer institute, conducted under the auspices of the University of Maryland’s *Curriculum Transformation Project*, and directed by Deborah Rosenfelt, brought together faculty from women’s studies programs in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, and the United States. During the institute, four international colleagues and I collaborated on a project to design an online course about women’s health and well-being with a comparative transnational orientation. In 2007, with funding from the *Curriculum Transformation Project*’s Ford Foundation Grant, we co-taught the course cross-institutionally to women’s studies students in Africa, Israel, and the United States. This virtual classroom served as the second research-gathering venue for the dissertation project. Methods of qualitative research

theorized by Adele Clarke (2005) and Laura L. Ellingson (2009) assisted me in conducting a situational analysis of the empirical data contributed by student informants, and in scaffolding a crystallized framework by which to re/represent findings.

In sharing here the stories of students' virtual knowledge-making experiences, I chronicle the use of communication technologies to support the growth of an online learning community. Our transnational and constructivist course design was innovative at that particular moment in time; equally, it encompassed an under-theorized area of research in the small but growing literature exploring online learning in higher education (Yvonne Fung, 2004; Pat Jefferies, 2003; Dina Lewis & Barbara Allan, 2005; Melissa B. Littlefield & Kendra C. Roberson, 2005; Elizabeth J. Tisdell, 1998). Although research documenting online teaching and learning has rapidly expanded since we first taught the course in 2005, qualitative inquiry into students' experiences as online learners is still nascent (Julian Buchanan, Stephen T. Wilson, & Nirmala Gopal, 2008; Brenda Moore, 2008; Gunilla Öberg, 2009; Alan Pritchard, 2007; Binaya Subedi & Jeong-eun Rhee, 2008; Yasmeen Yusuf-Khalil, *et al.*, 2007). Together with other recent scholarship, the findings from this qualitative research underscore and more particularly illuminate the value to virtual peers of constructivist and dialogic transactions in facilitating productive knowledge-making collaborations (Vivienne Bozalek, 2011; Sharon Collingwood, *et al.*, 2012; Poul Rohleder *et al.*, 2008).

In narrating the knowledge-making experiences of participants in the *Women's Health and Well-Being* (WHWB) course as our *shared* story, I make explicit my investment in self-reflexive collaboration with others, and my conviction that a praxis facilitating collaborative learning transactions in the virtual classroom enables transgressive and transformative knowledge-making opportunities. In re/representing the voices of student informants, together with those of myself and my colleagues, I assert their experiences and insights to be of value in theorizing these processes. I anticipate that as readers engage the spectrum of diverse – and sometimes contradictory – perspectives in this intentionally polyphonic narrative, they will experience the viscerally compelling character of the multi-sensory knowledge-making transactions in which learners were “virtually” immersed throughout the course.

Emerging from virtual transactions interpretively re/represented in Chapters Five and Six are a chorus of student and faculty voices attesting to the transformative quality of our peer collaborations, both in designing and in experiencing this transnational classroom. Student texts evidenced an engaged learning praxis beyond our expectations, both in the degree to which participants found their collaborative transactions to have been rewarding, and in the degree to which these virtual collaborations scaffolded a critical reflexivity in the co-construction of transgressively alternative and altered understandings of women's experiences of health and well-being.

Despite the obvious and striking differences in the situations of this course and the *Women, Art and Culture* course examined in previous chapters, analysis of data from both venues produces a shared finding. Students' experiences of socio-constructivist practices, particularly their facilitated dialogic transactions with other learners (prompted in and through a variety of discussion formats), were found by participants in each instance to have been extremely meaningful and significant elements of their knowledge-making processes.

In Chapter Five, I first situate this transnational and cross-institutional virtual classroom by sketching the collaborative process which my co-teaching colleagues and I shared in designing the course. An overview of the constructivist deployment of the technologies utilized, and a demographic analysis of the student actors follows. Chapter Five concludes with a descriptively interpretive re/representation of texts constructed by students in their initial online transactions. In these introductory dialogues, students were prompted to share with one another their experiences and understandings of women's health and well-being. Chapter Six uses re/representations of informant texts to chart the learning praxis in which virtual peers were engaged as they collaboratively constructed digital knowledge projects about women's health and well-being across geographic boundaries and socio-cultural barriers of difference.

Discursively Constructing the Virtual Classroom: A Teaching Collaboration

In previous articles and conference presentations, my colleagues and I have written about our participation in this three-year teaching collaboration (Kimberlee Staking, 2008; Yusuf-Khalil, *et al.*, 2007).¹ Large as it loomed in our lives for those

years, however, it was only a small part of a much larger project, a ten year grant for internationalizing curriculum in higher education awarded by the Ford Foundation to the *Curriculum Transformation Project* at the University of Maryland. Among other projects, the Ford Foundation funding enabled the University of Maryland's *Curriculum Transformation Project* to sponsor a series of summer institutes bringing together an international consortium of women's studies faculty to "internationalize curriculums, facilitate the transnational exchange of ideas and knowledge, and contribute to the evolutions of women's and gender studies, especially at the graduate level" (Kimberlee Staking, 2008, p. 1).

Joining me at the 2004 summer institute in the project to construct an online curriculum module with a transnational focus were women's studies academics from Bar-Ilan University (Israel), Makerere University (Uganda), the University of the Western Cape (South Africa), and the University of the West Indies (Jamaica). Our work group was one of five participating in the two week institute.² Although we were all relatively inexperienced in online teaching, with intensive support from the IT staff at the University of Maryland, each of the five work groups created the blueprint for a web-based unit of study. Three of these modules, including ours on women's health and well-being, were incorporated as mini-units into already existing courses being taught in the 2005 academic year.³

While inexperienced in online teaching, the five of us came to the institute deeply invested in the notion of designing a transnational curriculum. Despite the obvious challenges such a project would pose, its potential for constructing new

knowledges for teachers and students alike convinced us that it would be worth the effort and commitment it would require of us (Kimberlee Staking, 2008). We anticipated that in mobilizing bodies of feminist knowledge across national borders, a cross-institutional e-module would provide learning opportunities beyond those we might secure through our individual efforts within local contexts.

We chose to design our course as a transnational exploration of women's gendered experiences of health and well-being chiefly because each of our research and teaching interests interrogate the gendering of women's lived experiences. The topic both encompassed, and took advantage of, each of our funds of knowledge and lived experiences – professional, pedagogical and technological. In collaboration, our distinctive disciplinary backgrounds complimented one another. My use of digital technologies in the teaching of women's studies, feminist art history, and visual culture provided a baseline for imagining a web-based pedagogy with cross-disciplinary knowledge-making practices. Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo is a social anthropologist applying IT to her field-centered work on women and gender. Her projects emphasize education, prevention and care of women with HIV/AIDS, and maternal and reproductive health in rural communities. Vivienne Bozalek is a social work scholar with emphases on family studies, and women and social policy. Vivienne had also begun using technology in teaching collaborations with colleagues at other South African institutions in and near Cape Town. Rivka Tuval-Mashiach is an academic as well as a practicing clinical psychologist specializing in women, trauma, and mental health. Yasmeen Yusuf-Khalil is a curriculum specialist with an emphasis

on distance-learning projects. Her work focuses on intersections between gender, education, teacher preparation, and economic development.

In working together to design a syllabus interrogating transnational dimensions of women's experiences of health and well-being, the five of us discovered a shared enthusiasm for social-constructivist methods of learner inquiry. In retrospect, it was this combination of factors – our willingness to experiment with technological innovation, along with our similar pedagogical commitments – that kept us working together through the challenges that lay ahead. These challenges included a diverse range of socio-cultural-religious-political differences, multiple institutional and governmental resource constraints, widely disparate time zones, limited time availability, and an already full complement of professional commitments.

As we worked together on the pilot module in 2004, we recognized that our prospective student participants would, like ourselves, be richly diverse in geographic identities, and in many other respects, including disciplinary background, level of matriculation at the university, access to knowledge about women's health and well-being, and socioeconomic status and identity markers, such as class, race, and gender. In order to capitalize upon the multiple and diverse funds of knowledge and experience that would be represented among our participants, and hoping to create a highly interactive and deeply engaging virtual learning community, we drew on the full spectrum of communication modes available to us through the University of Maryland's online course management system (WebCT) in prompting peer learning transactions. As we later noted in a co-authored article describing our collaboration:

In scaffolding tasks that were both manageable across a range of institutional ICT capabilities and engaging for students in diverse disciplines and locations, we intended the module to build the capacity of students at each of the institutions to engage productively in online distance learning. We further anticipated that participation in the module would assist students to develop interdisciplinary and transcultural knowledge with respect to women's health and well-being. We also hoped that as students engaged virtually with one another in these interdisciplinary and transnational elements of the course situation, they would be better enabled to co-construct enhanced and deepened understandings of women's health needs globally (Yasmeen Yusuf-Khalil, *et al.*, 2007, p. 55).

Each of the modes of learner engagement that we designed for the course drew upon relational interactions. In asking students to reflectively and reflexively engage one another in knowledge-building process, we signaled our assumption that learning is a situated process occurring in a context that is not necessarily transparent to others. Drawing upon the Vygotskyian model of the *Zone of Proximal Development* (Lev S. Vygotsky, 1978; Etienne Wenger, 2000), we assumed that learning would be maximized through a collaborative praxis that supported learners' achievement of the next level of learning. In planning e-learning tasks, we intentionally devised strategies to tap into students' situated knowledges about and experiences of health and well-being. As students engaged one another virtually, we anticipated that they would continually share in and inform one another's perspectives.

Our overall design thus foregrounded joint knowledge construction across geographical contexts, and the deployment of digital technologies to promote the social aspects of learning (Jean Lave & Etienne Wenger, 1991). Fostering collaborative knowledge-building through tasks that would be shared and peer reviewed, we placed a high value on critical practices of reflection, respecting student

views and perceptions in the process. The questions we posed about women's health and well-being were ones that really puzzled us, and to which there was no right or wrong response. Thus, the interactive and dialogically engaged participation of all students in the learning community in co-constructing knowledge was explicitly regarded as valuable (A.W. Bates & Gary Poole, 2003).

Although external financial support was limited to the funding grant from the Ford Foundation, the generously unstinting step-by-step guidance from the capable and willing IT staff at the University of Maryland (anchored by Mary Kot-Jensen) supported our fledging efforts. Once the summer institute was finished, and my colleagues returned to their own institutions and to their professional responsibilities, I became the informally appointed coordinator of our e-learning effort. In preparation for the pilot trial in the spring of 2005, I spent uncounted hours in the fall of 2004 ironing out the nitty-gritty details of the module we'd mapped out together. An important and time-consuming part of this process, particularly for a technology novice such as myself, was forging the necessary collaborative connections between IT staff at the University of Maryland and IT staff at each of the other institutions.

The Pilot Module: Implementing the Syllabus

Our planned three-week pilot in the spring of 2005 commenced with students' asynchronous participation in transnational virtual dialogues, which prompted them to describe their individual understandings and experiences of what constitutes health and well-being. After responding to one another's posts, they were then asked to describe factors that they felt contribute to, or compromise, women's health and well-

being in their local contexts. The conversations were authentically rich and engaging as students discovered that their experiences and understandings of basic health and well-being across contexts of difference (age, gender, geography, socio-economic class, etc.) were similar in some aspects and widely divergent in others. Texts from students responding to the same learning prompt in the 2007 iteration of the course that served as my research venue are selectively re/represented later in this chapter.

After a lively exchange of cross-posting, and analysis of relevant literatures, students were assigned to one of several cross-institutional work groups in which they collaboratively produced projects theorizing issues that compromise women's health and well-being transnationally. These projects were posted to the online course management platform at the University of Maryland for evaluative feedback from teachers and peers. Projects focused on topics for which the five of us could serve as resource specialists, namely bodily integrity, mental health, reproductive health HIV/AIDS, and social well-being. Each of us who were co-teaching the course facilitated one of the student work groups and was a secondary facilitator in one of the other work groups. As facilitators we mediated virtual group discussions, marked and provided feedback on assignments posted to the online course learning platform, guided content exploration, and helped to trouble shoot technology access or functionality issues. We envisioned our role as teachers to be that of 'more knowledgeable peers' rather than 'experts in the field' (Jean Lave & Etienne Wenger, 1991, p. 35).

Following the conclusion of the pilot module we were exhilarated to discover from student reflections that they perceived their participation to have been profoundly engaging and transformative in the new understandings thereby enabled. This was the case despite the not inconsiderable impact of their participation on the rest of their semester coursework, and the personal inconveniences posed to students in working collaboratively across multiple times zones. The extent of the disruption was multiplied when we extended the module from three weeks to six in order to allow time for the projects to be sufficiently well developed. To our dismay, the situation was then further compounded by a host of irksome technology issues arising out of our inexperience in facilitating virtual peer collaborations, and the belated discovery that our cross-institutional and socio-constructivist design was only clumsily supported in the WebCT platform we were using.⁴

As response to the course had, nonetheless, been so extraordinarily positive, we were delighted to receive a funding extension of the Ford Foundation grant that permitted us to report on the pilot module at the Seoul 2005 Women's Worlds Conference. It also allowed us to co-author an article about our collaboration, and to reconvene at the University of Maryland for a week in July 2006 to expand the original module into a semester-length course.



Figure 32: Course Design Team: Women’s Health and Well-Being – Yasmeen, Vivienne, Grace, Kimberlee, Rivka (2006)

Discursive Constructions: The 2007 WHWB Course

Having discovered such rich evidence of transformative learning engagement in data from participants in the 2005 pilot, we maintained the original emphasis on socio-constructivist engagement with peers in expanding the module. While retaining the introductory dialogues and the culminating group projects, we added a qualitative interview sequence to the middle section of the course, and constructed a learning analysis as part of the final sequence. With research funding obtained through the Women’s Studies Department, The School of Public Health, the College of Arts and Humanities, and the Provost’s office at the University of Maryland, we also added an

online video-conference feature that virtually convened participants from all sites to present to one another the findings of their culminating projects. As documented in comments from students re/reproduced in Chapter Six, this video-conference, which allowed participants to both see and hear all of their collaborative peers in a real time exchange, became a centerpiece of the course for which students universally expressed enthusiasm.

Figure 33, below, provides a graphic overview of the syllabus.

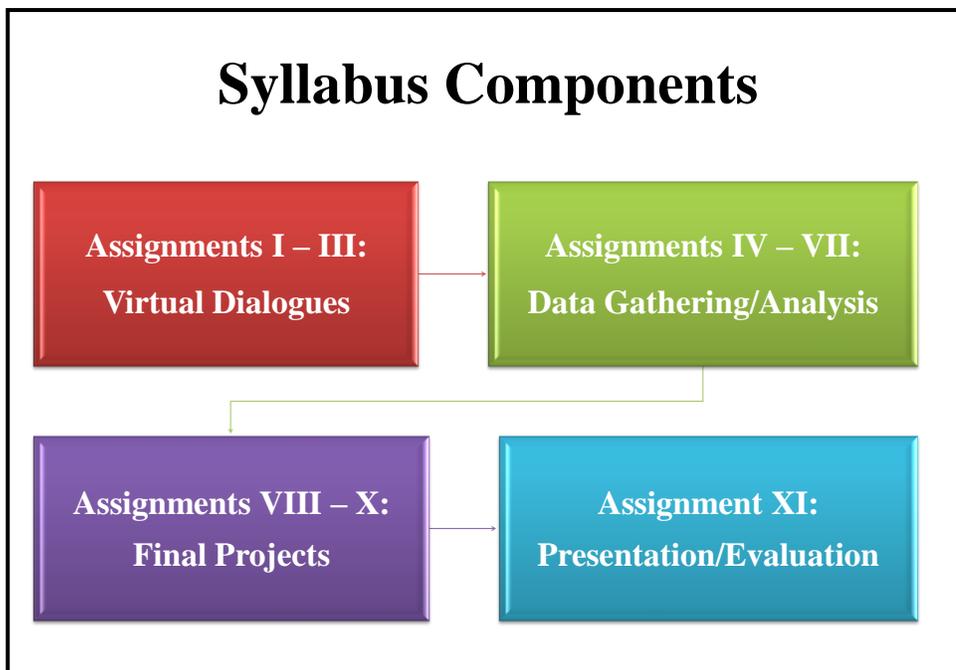


Figure 33: Syllabus Components

We anticipated that as students progressed through this course of study, their knowledge-making processes would reflect their development of new skills in each of the transactional modes and areas of inquiry that we had identified in learning outcomes:

1. Identification of factors that contribute to or constitute women's physical, social, and mental health and well-being in specific localities and across localities.
2. Identification of factors that enhance and/or compromise women's health and well-being in and across localities.
3. Collaborative engagement with other students and lecturers/facilitators to develop an awareness of gendered differences in the ways in which health and well-being is constructed and constituted across historical, cultural, generational, racialized, sexualized, classed, political and geographical contexts.
4. Collaborative engagement in constructing knowledge, and attention to interrogating power relations, in analyzing how women's health and well-being is experienced in and across contexts.
5. Development of empirical data about women's health and well-being through conducting a qualitative interview with a local informant.
6. Collaborative writing of a research project investigating one specific area relating to women's health and well-being at a transcultural level of analysis.
7. Presentation of group research project to other members of the class.

Human Actors: Student Demographics

As we prepared to launch the course in the spring of 2007, we were disappointed to learn that students from the University of the West Indies (UWI) would be unable to participate because of unanticipated budgetary constraints at their local institution. From the remaining participating institutions, we recruited forty students, which was the maximum number the four of us felt we would be able to facilitate without the participation of our colleague from UWI. Of these, thirty-three completed the course. As figure 34 indicates, students participated in greatest numbers from Makerere University and the University of Maryland. At both of these institutions students were advanced undergraduates in Women's and Gender Studies programs, enrolled in a special topics seminar on women's health and well-being. The course was somewhat easier for them to fit into their overall program of study than it was for students doing post-graduate work in the field of psychology at Bar-Ilan

University and in the field of nursing and public health at University of the Western Cape.

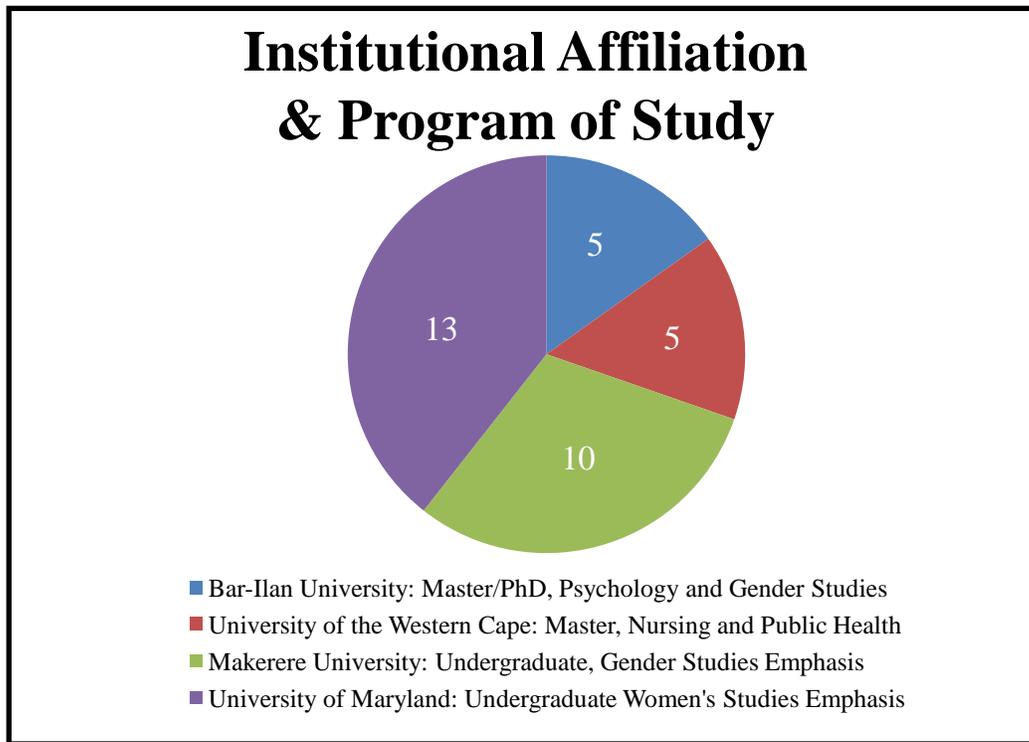


Figure 34: Institutional Affiliation and Program of Study

Unsurprisingly, as is summarized in the figure below, female students were enrolled at a ratio greater than their male counterparts. All but one of the male participants was enrolled in the gender studies program at Makerere University; the other male student was a distance learning student from Kenya enrolled with the cohort at the University of the Western Cape. Although the ratio of 1 male to every 4.5 females was less unbalanced than the ratio in the *Women, Art and Culture* research venue, the absence of additional male participants and perspectives was deemed disappointing by informants in this venue, as had been the case with students in the WAC venue. Participants speculated that perhaps there was greater male participation

at Makerere University because the program there is defined as a Gender Studies program rather than a Women's Studies program. (Although participants from Bar-Ilan University were also enrolled in a Gender Studies program, their post-graduate emphasis was focused on women, mental health, and trauma, and so was not a program that was sought out by male students.)

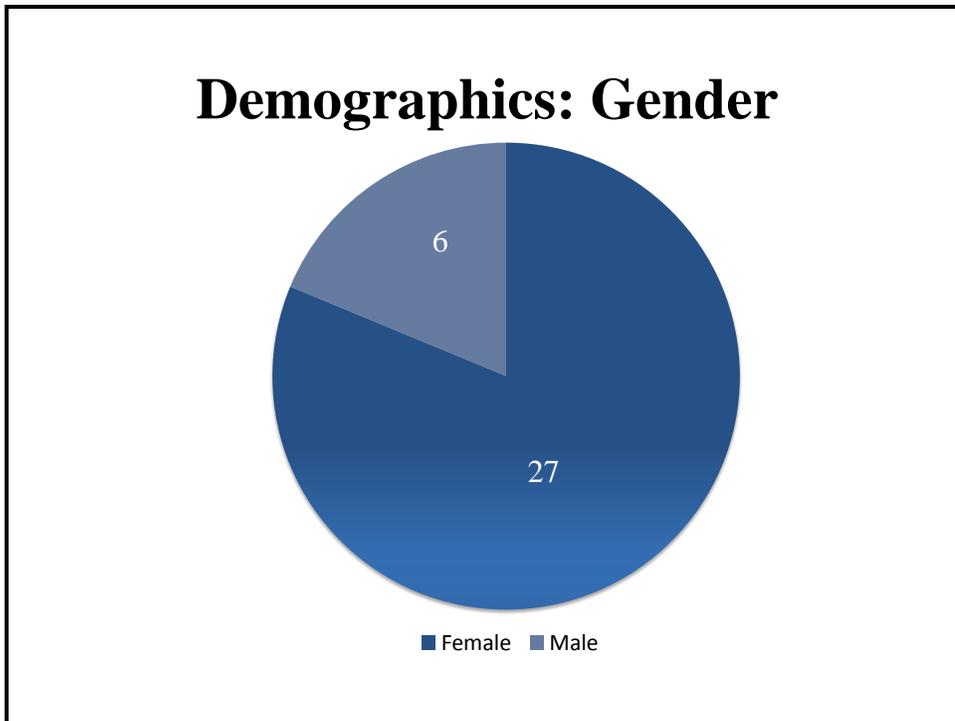


Figure 35: Demographics – Gender

As we prepared to host this expanded iteration of the course on UM's WebCT course management platform (with the bulk of participants enrolled at other institutions), we recognized that given both financial and technology challenges identified in the 2005 pilot, it would be advisable to relocate the course to the free and open source KEWL e-learning platform at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).⁵ Fortunately, as had been the case at University of Maryland, we found the IT

staff at UWC to be both capable and generous in their assistance as we prepared the course to be uploaded.⁶ The welcome page we constructed on the KEWL site for the 2007 course is reproduced in the screen shot below.⁷

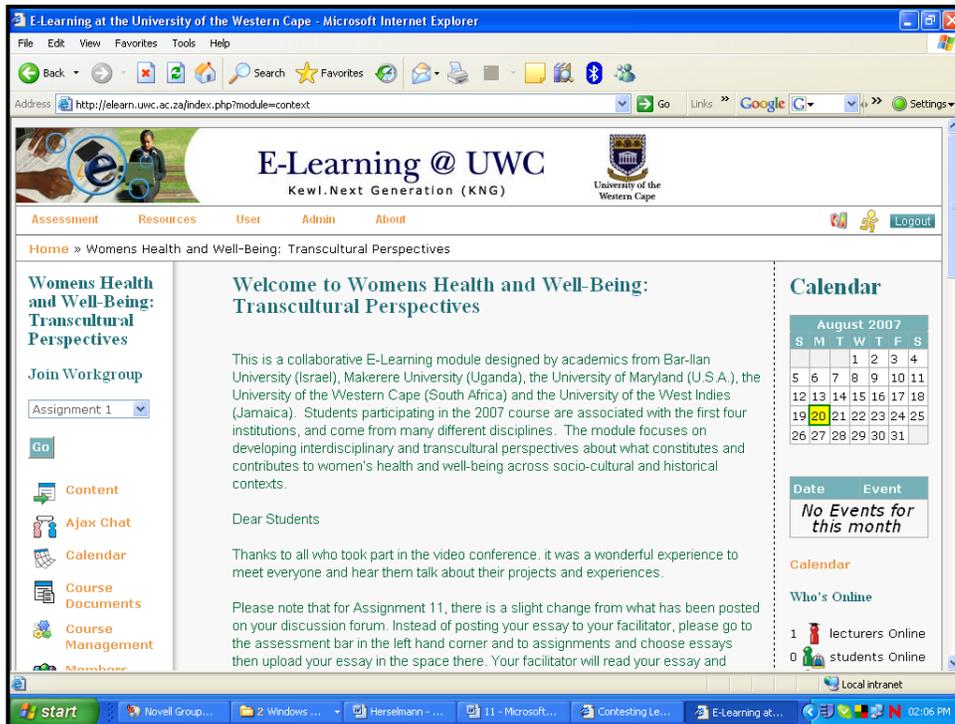


Figure 36: WHWB Welcome Screen

In Dialogue: Discursive Construction of Human Actors with Human and Non-Human Actants (Technologies, Bodies of Knowledge)

Situational analysis of data from the *Women's Health and Well-Being* course indicates five elements as having significantly shaped and constituted participant learning transactions. These elements (highlighted in the situational matrix in Chapter One) are:

- the discursive construction of human actors in the course;
- the discursive construction of human and non-human actants in the course;

- local and global conditions relating to women's health and well-being;
- contested issues relevant to women's health and well-being; and
- spatial and temporal issues present in the online learning environment

Crystallized writing practices in Chapters Five and Six, including selective re/representation of student texts illuminate the ways in which participants enrolled in the WHWB course experienced their learning transactions through these conditional elements.

Virtual Dialogues

Participants engaged one another in productive conversations from their initial virtual exchanges. Figure 37 summarizes the main tasks in unit one, all of which were dialogically based. The first was to write a 350 word introductory e-journal that included participants' own definition of what constitutes health and well-being, with relevant illustrations or personal examples. Students then responded to the postings of at least three virtual peers not from their own university. While rubrics were provided to assist students in constructing their e-journals posts, the online syllabus, posted in our KEWL course space clarified: there is no right or wrong answer so feel free to express yourself according to your own understanding. Please note that both your e-journal and your responses to your virtual classmates will be in a public discussion space available to all members of our course. Also, note that during the period of this course you will have the opportunity to change or modify your views.”

Virtual Dialogues

I. E-journal assignment:

Post introduction and personal explanation of health and well-being;

Respond to e-journals posted by three peers

II. Readings and Response: Complete readings on women's health and well-being

Post e-journal reflections

Post preferences for final group topic

III. Compare/contrast:

Dialogue with at least two virtual classmates about posted responses to the assigned readings

Figure 37 Introductory Assignments

Notably present in excerpts of these e-journals, below, is the sense of anticipation and pleasure with which participants engaged in these cross-institutional and transnational dialogues. Equally notable is the degree to which knowledge-making is observed to be reflective and collaborative. Participants gave thoughtful consideration to the question, decidedly re-orienting for many, as to what they understood the relationship to be between experiences of health and experiences of well-being. Upon reflection, and in conjunction with reading the comments of their virtual peers, most students felt that health was a component of well-being, or in other words, that well-being was a construct that included reference to one's health. And

while students found it easy to articulate what the absence of health and well-being meant to them, they were initially less certain how to describe what it would mean for women to experience positive states of health and well-being. Thus, the first knowledge-building themes to emerge in and from dialogic transactions were those probing barriers that students perceived to be compromising to women's experiences of health and well-being.

Excerpts reproduced below originate from the course archive on the KEWL e-learning platform at the University of the Western Cape. Some of the biographical information included by participants in their first posting is included to give readers a sense of the diverse backgrounds and interests that participants brought to the course. Emphases added are my own, and are made with the sole intention of underscoring the beginnings of many rich dialogic conversations and contestations about women's health and well-being that occurred in this first series of assignments. Re/representations, although abbreviated for considerations of space, are re/produced rather extensively to permit the reader to more fully experience this richness, which is extraordinary both in terms of depth and breadth for a first assignment. These assignments proved to be materially consequential to the capabilities of students to engage in a sustained praxis of collaborative knowledge-making as the course progressed.

Hallo from a rather hot South Africa! I am a single 27 year old female living in Cape Town. I was born and bred in South Africa and moved quite a bit during childhood. We are very close knit family and I believe that families can have a positive effect on your health and well-being. I am currently doing my Masters in Women and Gender Studies at the University of the Western Cape. I am aiming to do my thesis next

year in the area of women and technology . . . To answer the question posed, *women's health and well-being is different but closely connected*. Women's health refers to one's physical and mental state while well-being would refer to one's financial and mental health. I believe that women's health and well-being has an interconnected relationship as without the other, one's life becomes complicated . . . various conditions affecting women's health and well-being. For example, war would affect women's health and in turn affect their well-being as the country they find themselves in are politically not stable and women are affected the most during these pressing times . . . Thus I would say the two terms are separate but connected. I am looking forward to your responses!

The openly collaborative and generous attitude expressed by this student towards her new virtual classmates in the richly detailed excerpt above is characteristic of students' e-communications with one another in this and in all subsequent assignments. In responding to this introduction, a virtual classmate, below, asserts a socio-cultural component of women's experiences of health and well-being. Over and over again, students from Makerere and UWC insisted on the significance of the social context to women's experiences of health and well-being. This is in marked contrast to students from Bar-Ilan and UMD, who initially constructed understandings of health and well-being from a more individualist perspective.

Hey, this is S. from Uganda. *It's a pleasure to participate in such a great course that is helping us to get to interact with different people from different localities. It's good to understand different cultures since this widens your understanding . . . and can also help us to know how different cultures impact on women's health and well-being.* Your post is interesting and I do agree with you on the fact that women's health and well-being are connected because a popular use of the term well-being usually relates to health. However when you say health refers to ones physical or mental state only, you are leaving out the social well-being. So please to define health, let us consider it as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." [Note: The student has used a quote from Martha Nussbaum (2000) which was posted as a link in the online

course space and which all students were asked to read for the next assignment.]

The posting above generated general agreement and extensive commentary from virtual peers as students participated in the give-and-take process of collaborative knowledge-making. The comment below focuses on both the inter-connectedness of the two concepts (health and well-being), and on the impact of socially constructed frameworks, such as patriarchy and gender, to women's experiences of both.

I am a female Ugandan married with three children. Am a social worker by profession with a 25-year work experience as a welfare officer with the Uganda police force – Ministry of Internal Affairs. Am a third year evening student . . . in the final semester, pursuing a bachelor's degree . . . Gender and development studies is my major course emphasis and psychology is the minor . . . *The terms "women's health" and "women's well-being," in my understanding refer to conditions of good and comfortable living of women in all aspects of their lives; emotionally, spiritually, physically, psychologically, socially, culturally and politically . . . it is hard to differentiate one from the other because they overlap each other, they are complimentary to each other . . . In my view women's health is relating more to biology, bodily integrity, reproduction, and child- birth. In this case I look at health in the absence of disease as a major aspect of women's living. Well-being has to do more with women's ability to think clearly, be able to understand what goes on in their societies and the ability to judge what is best for them in terms of culture and other norms that subject them to the second class position. Women must have the ability to embrace the efforts being taken by others to emancipate them. For example a woman may be very healthy physically, emotionally, and the rest of the conditions mentioned above but then she may not have good interpersonal relationships with the social networks like the husband, relatives, friends . . . This will make the woman's well-being not good.*

The social component of *well-being* continued to be extensively discussed and contested in virtual dialogues. Note in the exchanges below the ways in which students grapple productively with the concepts, and began to

focus their dialogues on tensions observed between notions of individual and collective well-being. Note also clear references to earlier virtual exchanges.

Greetings to everyone, I am a 22 year old Ugandan male, the only child of my beloved mother, and the first born of my father's five children. Currently, am a full time student at the University of Makerere . . . Am a major of social administration, and a minor of gender and development studies. *Health* in my understanding covers the physical, mental, sexual, psychological, and spiritual well-being in totality. It is not necessarily the absence of disease, but rather . . . *constitutes aspects like good feeding, having access to foods with all nutrients necessary for good health, access to routine medical examination, being genuine to one's self through life style, getting enough sleep, or relaxing after a stressful day.* On the other hand, *well-being*, an important concern, involves access to resources and services, freedom, and happiness. Our well-being is shaped by our upbringing, personal circumstances or choices, and the social condition in which we live. *Collective well-being is improved if we live in a peaceful, flourishing and supportive society.* This explains the fact that it flows from individuals to society. Health is one of the aspects that determine well-being.

The student above has differentiated very clearly between the two terms, indicating his sense that well-being depends on one's socio-political location. In the next posting, a participant from the University of Maryland notes that his comment caused her to re-consider her understanding of women's differential abilities to respond to their differently positioned circumstances of health and well-being.

I really enjoyed your description of health. I found that it showed me what my own definition – and even understanding – of women's health is missing. This is because a lot of the examples you gave — “good feeding,” “getting enough sleep,” “relaxing after a stressful day” — depict women as agents in regard to their health. It wasn't until I read these examples that I realized that the definition I gave lacks any acknowledgment of this agency. By failing to mention this **agency** . . . I portrayed women's health as conditions to which women and their bodies were defenseless. Thus, I really like that you made me realize that women's health isn't just medicine and science — it's action, and women have the power to act.

Another respondent, from Bar-Ilan University, both validates and contests the original posting:

I completely agree with your definition of health, it is not just the absence of disease and illness . . . *However I believe that well-being is more than just material and mental things; my opinion of well-being is that it's a goal that we try to strive for.* Well-being deals with realms that impact us spiritually, physically and psychologically.

A striking example in the counter-reply from the original respondent (Makerere University) illustrates the kinds of relationship-building that marked dialogic transactions between peers as they included references to their own health and well-being; such exchanges personalized and made relevant the work of virtual knowledge-building across the potential barriers of transnational difference. This social element of relationship-building, first occurring through initial e-journal exchanges, was later described by many students as being effective preparation for their subsequent small group collaborations.

Hi V! Am so happy that you are in agreement with me. Did you have a nice weekend? How was it like? Mine was full of fun. I joined friends at the beach. We played volleyball (do you like it?), and fed ourselves to the fullest. You should join me (us) next time. Thanks for your knowledge of the fact that well-being is just more than material, and mental things. Please believe with me the aspects of political, economic and socio-cultural concerns around us. We strive to get employed, and work with well paying companies, which will easily give us the base to set up our own. In this we seek to be economically upright. We also strive to exist in politically sound environments where all institutions that influence well-being of individuals are active without any instability, or even to participate in politics, where it will be possible to influence decision making, to positively represent the vulnerable groups for the betterment of their well-being and ours as well. We also strive to break patriarchal sentiments in our socio-cultural settings in order to pave way for women to enjoy the benefits of the public sphere. All this considered impacts our lives for the better . . . I wish you the best of today, B!

Virtual peers were not unwilling to ask for clarification and/or to pointedly contest initial understandings of health and well-being. This is illustrated in the excerpt below, an exchange between virtual peers from UMD and from Bar-Ilan.

Hello S. I do not agree with what you said about health and well-being. I feel like the terms are inter-changeable and identical. Health does describe the general condition of the mind and body, but that refers to a person's well-being! In fact health encompasses well-being. When I think of well-being I think of the "welfare" or health of a person and happiness. A person is happy if they are healthy, prosperous, and free! Do you see how easy it is to use the two interchangeably? J. (UMD)

Thank you for your reply. I still do not agree with you and think that "well-being" is a broader term than health. My friend, whose situation I previously described, does not strike me as "unhealthy", although I definitely feel her overall welfare/well-being is severely damaged from her depression. S. (Bar-Ilan)

As will be evident in the reading of participant narratives re/represented in Chapter Six, by the conclusion of the course, most participants noted that their original understandings of women's health and well-being had undergone modification as a result of their shared knowledge-making experiences. Students such as the one above who asserted the *inter-changeability* of the terms health and well-being were the most likely to have re-constructed their notions following virtual dialogues with their transnational peers. Newly constructed understandings highlighted and theorized lived experiences that had been shared in virtual conversations, as well as those realized from engagement with relevant academic discourse. The respondent below highlights all of the above in sharing understandings of health and well-being.

I am a Kenyan lady residing in South Africa with my family and studying at the University of Western Cape, doing a Masters in Advanced Midwifery and Neonatology. I previously worked in intensive care unit and currently working with high care neonates and maternal units. My interest is in gender and reproductive health. My thesis will be based on HIV positive mothers and their neonates . . . In the past women's health was focused on reproductive health issues such as maternal care and family planning . . . It did not put into account the fact that this was just a part of the woman and she is encompassed by more than just the need to space children . . . as a mother and wife. *Well-being* in my view is encompassed as the core of her functioning, the woman being able to realize that she always should have her 'cup full' before she can take care of the rest of the society especially in the African setup where the woman puts herself last and the needs of everyone else before hers . . . The woman needs to be part of the decisions and policies made for her. Doesn't always happen in practice for most of the population in Africa that I know of; does it in your populations? Your responses please!!!!

This posting initiated a vigorous discussion about the impact of societal practices equating and/or reducing women's bodies to their reproductive capacities. In the posting below, the writer's response validates the journal reflection above, asserting that in her experience Israeli women also typically construct their own well-being as a secondary concern to that of others. At the same time, her response demonstrates how her culturally informed experiences with, and ideas about, women's health conditions in locations different from her own, such as in Africa, had been challenged and changed by her classmate's post.

I'm an Israeli woman and an expert in psychotherapy with women. It was very interesting to read what you wrote about women in Africa. It seems that they really suffer from oppression and they can't choose about their life? . . . I strongly agree with you about the idea that a woman must take care of herself in order to take care for all the others. And I'm working with my clients about this point. It's amazing to look at the very common idea that women should take care and nurture the "whole world", as you wrote, without being nurturance (sic) for themselves. It is impossible to do it, and I agree with you that it is not a

realistic expectation, and it hurts the women's well-being because they feel that something is wrong with them. I also agree with you about the idea that women “need to be part of the decisions and policies” in order to improve well-being – *and as a result from improving the women's well-being, their health will improve.*

Another respondent underscores the ways in which political, social, and environmental conditions inform women’s abilities to make reproductive choices.

Am glad to know that I have someone from my country Kenya taking the program with me. Let me take this chance to appreciate what you have been doing and what you are still doing for the good health of women and their well-being . . . I want to concur with you in your definition of health in relation to women that it entails the physical, mental and the psychological as well as their spiritual soundness. It’s true that in the recent past women’s health was only looked at from the reproductive side. Such has caused a lot of sufferings and even death to many women due to the neglect of the social environment in which women live and its impact in their health . . . I look at women’s social well being as having all the important human values that would help one to be able to attain a good standard of living free from discrimination, coercion, isolation, and all forms of inequalities.

The posting below generated deeply empathetic responses from virtual peers.

The dialogue that ensued as a result of the frankness with which this participant described knowledge about health and well-being, constructed out of her lived experience, served as the impetus for a final group project that superbly explored the transcultural dimensions of maternal mental well-being.

Society is responsible to keep its members healthy. Israel is very developed country in terms of health system. Giving birth to my baby was safe and good . . . Giving birth to motherhood was much more difficult because of the same society, its expectations of women, values, and beliefs that left me very lonely, healthy (thank God) but my being wasn’t well. I’m religious and it is very central in my life and I’m a committed feminist, struggling in conflicts between the two identities . . . I’ve started a journey to PhD in gender studies, because I hope it will deepen my understanding in both worlds Jewish and feminist. I wish to contribute something to the dialog between the two. Well-being enables

good health and vice versa. When my first son was born I was depressed . . . It took few weeks until I was healthy again, but my well-being was threatened, and it took me three years to really overcome this crisis. I felt I'm losing everything that made my life worth living: my brain, my body, my sexuality, intellectual interests, vitality. I felt angry at myself, my husband and above all – my baby. I was disappointing everyone; this is not what motherhood meant to be.

In these processes of dialoguing back and forth together, participants deepened their understanding of what constituted components of health and well-being across local and global contexts, probed the relationship between the two constructs, and pondered the impact of socio-cultural factors on women's well-being, as well as the degree of agency women are able to exercise in their health choices. Their postings both explicitly reference, and implicitly demonstrate, multiple evidences of the strength of localized social and cultural factors in their experiences of and understandings about women's health and well-being.

As students continued with the next assignment, the considerable disparities in their experiences about women's health and well-being served to animate their transnational knowledge-building collaborations. Equally, as participants began to know more about one another as a result of their cross-institutional dialogues, and as they began to work collaboratively in small groups, they began to engage one another's identities in a myriad of complexly nuanced discursive transactions. Considerations of space and privacy have constrained my ability to include more than a small sampling of their texts. Nonetheless, I have attempted to make the selection as broadly representative as possible in reflecting the growth of individual learners, and of the virtual community itself.⁸

Discursive Constructions: Engaging Relevant Literatures

To build upon new ideas about, and understandings of women's health and well-being generated through their initial dialogic exchanges, students posted reflective comments about critical literatures we had selected theorizing women's health and well-being from a variety of transnationally-informed perspectives. All students read an essay on the human capabilities approach to resource distribution by Martha Nussbaum (Women and Work – the Capabilities Approach, 2000). Additional reading selections identified for students were selections from the websites of the World Health Organization and the United Nations Population Fund Millennium Development Goals and an article by Christiane Northrup (Empowering Women's Health, 2002). Each of these selections, though transnational or global in scope, reflected theoretical and policy approaches to women's health and well-being that were distinct from one another. Students were asked to select at least one article to read and comment on in addition to the Nussbaum article.

While all students addressed Nussbaum's work in their journal posts, many of them did so indirectly, by using other readings, such as UNPF's Millennial Development Goals. They chose to do so in order to highlight structural barriers and other hindrances that they argued would affect attempts to implement Nussbaum's proposals. In general, participants from the University of Maryland were *more likely* to engage the theoretical implications of Nussbaum's framework without regard to the viability of implementing her framework, while students from Bar-Ilan University were *least likely* to journal about Nussbaum, preferring instead to concentrate on the

possibilities for female empowerment with respect to health and well-being theorized by Northrup. Participants from Makerere University and University of the Western Cape were *most likely* to use the WHO and UNFPA sites to the existence of overwhelming socio-cultural and structural constraints to improving women’s health and well-being in their local contexts.

Figure 38, below, graphs the relative frequency with which students cited themes from the readings to support their own positions about policy approaches with the potential to enhance or to compromise women’s health and well-being. As they had in assignment one, students were then prompted to respond to the postings of at least two virtual classmates, comparing and contrasting their understandings of the readings with those of their peers.

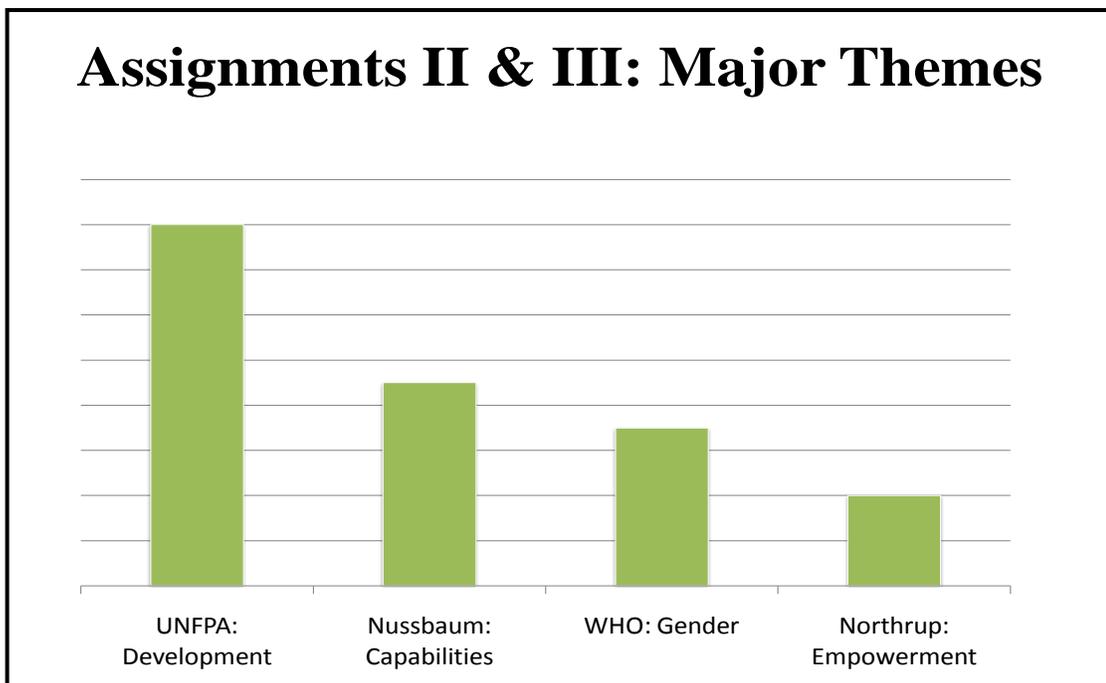


Figure 38: Major Themes Cited from Relevant Literatures

As students posted their reflections, and subsequently responded to those of their peers, their narratives make explicit the ways in which their earlier transnational dialogues remained provocative and relevant. As noted in excerpts selectively re/represented below, participants commented on ways in which the readings amplified ideas previously discussed in assignment one, and/or assisted virtual peers to more clearly understand positions articulated earlier by one another. Student exit evaluations subsequently indicated that dialoguing about these readings with their peers further prepared them for their upcoming data-gathering assignment to interview a local woman about her experiences of health and well-being.

Illuminated in the following excerpted texts are several examples of the types of transnational knowledge-building emerging from sense-making interactions between virtual peers as they discussed ideas they had found to be provocative in the readings. Evident throughout is the degree to which the socio-constructivist scaffolding of these assignments facilitated the integration of new perspectives by allowing learners to tap into prior learning and experience as they negotiated processes of meaning-making together. Postings also demonstrate the ways in which learners' initial dialogues with one another in assignment one contributed to their ability to engage meaningfully with the literature. Participants then built on their insights and those of their peers in constructing more complexly nuanced understandings of women's diverse and multi-faceted experiences of health and well-being. As a student at University of the Western Cape insightfully observed:

All in all, I feel my view of the subject is much more vast now that I received inspiring feedback from students and a framework of tools from the authors.

Representative Reflections: Nussbaum and human capabilities

As all students were directed to read Nussbaum's work (2000), many postings commented on her capabilities framework, asserting that all human beings have equal dignity and worth. Nussbaum frames her approach for guaranteeing this dignity with a list of ten capabilities, or "substantial freedoms", that every human being should be able to experience in and through their daily activities. These include capabilities of life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, emotion, reason, affiliation with other humans and other species, play, and control over one's political and material environment.⁹ While many students expressed enthusiasm for the theoretical apparatus she defines, most added guarded skepticism about its pragmatic possibilities for implementation.

Nussbaum . . . seemed to serve as an umbrella which encompassed many of the opinions from our initial virtual class discussion. She was able to argue against the current traditional "paternalistic" standpoint that prevents women from enjoying a basic quality of life equal to that enjoyed by men. Nussbaum's capability approach rejects the subjective questions of how satisfied a woman is with a more objective question of what can she do. I found this to be most significant aspect because it takes away the generic notion of measuring the well-being of a person based on GNP or other statistical measures, and replaces it with a measure of sincerity and a genuine inquiry of the individual state of one's life. Prior to reading Nussbaum, I felt as if I had a baseline perspective on women's health and well-being. However, after reading her work, I am coming to understand that the solution is of a multifactor basis. (UMD)

Her virtual classmate responds in a manner that affirms and extends this insight.

Hi L. Your reflection particularly enhanced my insight into the benefit of the capabilities approach as being a much more objective measure of a woman's well-being than her satisfaction. I hadn't even thought about the subjectivity of one approach versus the objectivity of the other . . . The reading and our classmates' reflections have somewhat altered my initial reflection upon health and well-being, but more importantly, they have helped me organize my thinking about the topic, and helped me think of them more concretely. (Bar-Ilan)

Many students in the two cohorts above indicated that Nussbaum's work might provide them with helpful language and orienting perspectives in their efforts to work across relevant north/south and western/non-western divides as they worked to elaborate transnationally-informed knowledges about women's health and well-being together with their peers from the two African-sited institutions. Their reflections, however, are equally enriched by their insights into how they envision Nussbaum's ideas as having utility within their own local context as well as in other geographic locales. Although students from Makerere University and University of the Western Cape also found Nussbaum's ideas to be powerful in asserting universal notions of dignity, they were much less likely to envision or to describe potential scenarios for successful implementation of Nussbaum's framework within their local contexts.

Nussbaum presents a cross-cultural conceptual framework which establishes a set of human capabilities necessary for human functioning. While human rights is often considered western, political and social, the term capabilities has a more neutral and universal nature. As dignified humans, we have basic capabilities that enable us to live well. Repressive settings cause women to be deprived and cause them to be treated inhumanely . . . Beyond Nussbaum's parameters for measuring development and Northrup's attunement to align our deepest wisdom with our bodies' health and well-being . . . I would like to add that a human also has a right to live on this unpolluted earth, drink fresh water and breathe fresh air and enjoy the serenity of human nature and

world peace. These too are core factors and our base rights as humans.
(Bar-Ilan)

Most of my classmates clarified that “well-being” and “women’s health” are interlinked to each other. What Nussbaum's analysis terms the “capabilities approach” is a kind of interlinkage between the two terms . . . I also appreciated her important initial definition, the idea of human worth and dignity as a pre-condition; this is relevant in our context, women’s health and well-being from cross-cultural point of view . . . “Capabilities” sounds less western or “liberal” or “postmodern” than “rights”. Her analyses touched me deeply because I think that Israel has adopted the neo-liberalism way of thinking . . . the gaps between the classes are getting huger and huger, and it affects women’s health and well-being, especially old women and “women of colors” – Arab women and other minorities who live among us. (Bar-Ilan)

. . . Martha Nussbaum’s formulation of “capabilities” seemed to me very salient to issues of women’s health and well-being. In particular, this can be seen . . . by considering the crucial differences between rights and capabilities with respect to how women are actually doing. In the United States, many people do not have adequate access to health care; the state is hesitant even to fund health insurance for the children of working poor through the Children’s Health Insurance Program. While health care could be considered a “right,” there is a fundamental difference in the state’s role in terms of rights and capabilities: a woman here has the right to purchase health insurance for herself, but in reality she can only do so if she can afford it. Other nations such as the United Kingdom, have interpreted health more in terms of capability . . . In my mind, Nussbaum’s “capabilities” framework could provide an excellent way to look at this issue in the United States, because it would mandate working towards conditions that were actually conducive to women’s health. (UMD)

Participants in each of the four cohorts addressed the potential of Nussbaum’s framework to address inequities globally – whether institutional, socio-cultural or structural in nature.

. . . I am not sure that Nussbaum's framework is anything close to perfect or ideal (how would many indigenous cultures feel about her inclusion of the right to own land as an individual?). However, it helped me think more deeply about a couple of things. First of all, it was a reminder of the necessity of both the politically protected right to health and well-being, and the material and social environment in which health and well-being is a real possibility for women; and it offers language, "capability," to encompass all of these aspects. Secondly, it reminded me of the struggle to be able to identify and share points of common experience for women across cultures, without presuming to fully understand or judge another's individual and cultural context. (UMD)

I noticed a correlation between the qualities of happiness and freedom and good health that I referenced in my first post and Martha Nussbaum's "Basic Human Capabilities." However, Nussbaum highlighted a critical component that I did not address: "the material." A woman's role (often as unpaid labor) within the global economic framework complicates matters . . . additionally, within the local and global context, the control and regulation involved in law-making processes make it difficult for women to achieve their full-human potential . . . Although I do not completely agree with all of Nussbaum's ideas, her essay does provide an alternate point of view that does not put women in terms of a victim status, but rather in terms that actually push them into a state of agency as she emphasized the fact that women are human. (UMD)

The social aspect was also emphasized by Nussbaum to contribute to women's health and well-being and this was in line with our argument. For example she talked about affiliation and talked of being able to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction, to be able to imagine the situation of another and to have the compassion for that situation, to have the capability for both friendship and justice, which is vital in political participation, free speech protection and association. Nussbaum also talked of the control over one's environment. This entails at a minimum protection against discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, caste, ethnicity, or national origin. And having a right to hold property both land and movable goods, to seek for employment on equal basis with others. (Makerere)

The capabilities approach as well as my virtual classmates' views has challenged my understanding and my 'taking for granted' such capabilities. Martha Nussbaum contends that the central question in her argument is "What can women do or be? When we were originally asked to define women's health and well-being I never considered concepts such as education that inevitably affect the well-being of a woman. Education presents a person with the ability to choose. I see education as an enabler. It enables a person the option to be something or do something. (UWC)

Reflections: Northrup and Gender-Based Health Empowerment

The aspects of Christiane Northrup's (2002) argument that were most commented upon were those that discussed women's health needs from a holistic perspective attentive to the connection between a woman's mind and her state of bodily integrity. Northrup's work was most likely to solicit reflection from students enrolled at Bar-Ilan University than elsewhere; that students from Bar-Ilan were studying gender and psychology illuminates a possible reason for their taking up Northrup's work. Participants from Bar-Ilan however, were also, more likely to note the limitations they perceived in Northrup's work than were students whose responses primarily addressed Nussbaum's work.

Christiane Northrup's text *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom*, did help me to conceptualize my views pertaining to health and well-being. What stood out for me was that women using their creative ovarian energy promotes women's health . . . What devastated me was her sharing at the end of the book that she actually had her fallopian tubes tied which seemed to me, not practicing what she preaches. She calls for tapping into our natural, instinctual wisdom and respecting our bodies' dialogue with us and then she goes and manipulates hers' mechanically and surgically. I feel a need to respect our bodies' integrity and befriend it, not belittle or betray it! . . . However, she presents a global gendered perspective since all women can situate themselves on the continuum of mothering types and feeling pain . . .

being consciously aware of all aspects of our lives, controlling them and directing our life, improves our health and well being. (Bar-Ilan)

I've read Christiane Northrup's chapter and I admit: I disagree with some of her **diagnosis**. Nevertheless there are some significant ideas, which relates to women's health and wellbeing . . . Northrup, like Nussbaum, mentioned pre-conditions and demands women need in order to achieve well-being and good health, as well as having free choice in patriarchal societies. On the other hand, Northrup draws only one model, of women who obey "the strong biologic pull of fertility and motherhood" and therefore, her description is one dimensional. (Bar-Ilan)

Northrup speaks of wholeness . . . my reflection on this is that health means to be whole . . . health is to be in tune with myself and my instincts, to be in balance through examining and fully engaging in my own holism. Our body has an intimate language through which we can decipher what our soul requires of us. This is empowerment. (Bar-Ilan)

By contrast, responses below, citing the two United Nations web sites, again strongly underscore the inescapable social dimensions of health and well-being perceived by respondents to affect women's experiences of them in African contexts.

By reading the United Nations Population Fund's Millennium Goals, I can now further discuss the issue of why I feel women are not given equal rights to men . . . from personal experience in South African Government Hospitals and Clinics, the focus is just on women; women are mostly given contraceptives, tested for HIV during pregnancy and treated for STD's, but the men are never seen. HIV pregnant women go home knowing their status, probably infected by their husband, given an STD and their husbands still refuse to use protection during intercourse. A strategy should be implemented to include the men in this process as well. (UWC)

I agree with your observations made as to the need to ascertain the barriers of sustainable development as they will be closely related to good health. Discrimination of women contributes to ill health as it

limits their accessibility to durable resources or fixed assets like land and what is done on it. Barriers exist in nearly every culture and this increases marginalisation, health and well-being. Millennium development goals may help women to raise their status; universal primary education has helped young girls to acquire some basic education . . . Even this has postponed early marriages and protected girls from becoming mothers at early age and we hope by 2015 this goal will yield more fruits for women around the world. (Makerere)

Many participants noted that their understanding of structural barriers impeding women's abilities to experience health and well-being (as discussed in the readings) was strengthened by sharing the reflections of their transnational peers. Students continually supported their reflections by referencing not only their own lived contexts, but those put forth by their peers.

Hey V.! In my previous summary of what I thought women's health and well-being meant I had left out the financial aspect of the equation. I guess I had taken the standpoint of the intrinsic determinants of health and well-being. However after reading Nussbaum and your post I have changed my outlook . . . If a woman is prevented from accessing work, than clearly in turn she will be unable to provide for herself and her family. I feel as if I have bypassed this in my previous post due to the fact that in the U.S., getting a job is not very difficult. The job itself may not pay very well and or the conditions may not be optimal, but there is opportunity to get one. Thus, I agree with your take on "financial constraints"! (UMD)

I have found the readings to be very enriching. While I concentrated on Nussbaum's reading, others have concentrated on UNFPA and WHO's Department of Gender. We have spotted the barriers that hinder women from having access to health care and from attaining and maintaining the best possible health. These include poverty, unequal power relations between men and women and lack of education. Other factors reflected on were the strategies and programmes set forward to reduce maternal and infant/child mortality; the two go hand in hand. If a mother dies the probability of the infant to live or have a healthy life becomes very minimal especially in developing countries. They also strive for the life expectancy that can also lead to economic development, universal

primary education that may facilitate girls especially in developing countries to delay sex and eliminate early marriages. B. identified the need to target rural women in a special way. It is indeed necessary because the majorities of women live in rural areas and seem to be more disadvantaged as compared to the urban women. Most of them hardly travel beyond their areas of origin hence are not exposed to the outside world, making them ignorant of issues pertaining their health and well-being. (Makerere)

Hey M. You enriched my knowledge when you wrote: “definitely that girl will experience good health because she will be getting advices from the mother that can help her avoid some circumstances that can lead to poor health like HIV and AIDS”. I was reading Northrup as a white woman who lives in a developed country and as such, I neglected to see things through non-western eyes. Yes. Mothers can and should help their daughters to avoid bad circumstances like AIDS. I never thought about it, because here we have huge awareness campaigns. I think things are quite different in Uganda and therefore it’s important to realize that my “women’s health” definition is different from yours. Thanks for making me more aware and sensitive. (Bar-Ilan)

It was very interesting to read about the way you connected Nussbaum’s themes and your definition with health and well-being by concluding that women should have autonomy. Of course I can’t disagree with you that women should have the ability to live their lives as they see fit. However this is simply not enough for them to reach their fullest potential as functioning humans. I feel that the government should not just pronounce these rights but to also have opportunities and resources ready for women to use them . . . Women could be autonomous and be married with children but if the government does not step in and provide her with necessary resources like financial aid or day-care then when will she find time to go to school to study so that she will be able to pursue her career aspirations? The U.S. is based on the value of freedom but at the same time it is a nation with the highest poverty rate when you compare it to other developed and industrialized countries. These women in poverty have autonomy; however because of their lack of accessible resources many of these women do not have the ability to choose which opportunities they wish to pursue. (UMD)

Hi A.! I read your posting and it was really good, encouraging and above all, educative. I also agree with you on the point of women not having equal rights and opportunities in some societies and countries because for example here in Uganda, women are regarded as an inferior sex and most of the privileges and rights are enjoyed by only men and this has affected women's health and well being because of lack of resources like money to improve on their health and well-being. For example, women/girls in Uganda are always denied the right to education, and employment . . . and this always done on the assumption that 'men are the house hold heads and therefore they should be the ones to provide for the women and therefore no need of employing women.' Here in Uganda, even if a woman has much money, she is never "equal to the man" and to make matters worse, the men here even control the income of all the family members. So you can see that in some countries, thing are different, being well off does not mean being equal, with equal rights, opportunities and privileges. The questions are what can be done to ensure that women's health and well-being is improved? Why is it that reproductive health programmes always target women as compared to men and yet reproductive health is also a men's issue? (Makerere)

The posting above is particularly poignant, given that the author is one of the male participants; the perspectives of his transnational peers have prompted him to challenge the dominant cultural construction of the role of males in his country. In the two postings below, female students from the University of the Western Cape address one of the other male participants.

Hi: W. I totally agree with you. You have raised some important points that make me think deeper about women's health and well-being. The fact that some women have no access to education or resources in some parts of the world is a contributing factor of the low status that women experience. You are right – culturally women are also excluded as they are viewed to have no valuable contribution.

I enjoyed reading your posting on the reflections. I agree with you when you say that "Women do not have the opportunity to develop and exercise their human powers." The reality is that many women are not given the room to exercise rights. In my Shona culture in Zimbabwe,

most women are aware that they live below their potential but they seem to be powerless in gaining the strength to implement that knowledge.

Contestations: Responding to Virtual Classmates

Assignments two and three provided opportunities for course participants to engage in extended dialogues with one another as they compared and contrasted their understandings of the readings. One such extended exchange occurred between a student at the University of Maryland and students from Makerere University and from the University of the Western Cape. Their dialogic exchange is notable (although not exceptional) for the willingness of learning peers to ask for clarification from the student at the University of Maryland, and for the willingness of the student at UMD to respond. The UMD student begins by noting her disagreement with several points in the Martha Nussbaum reading. In this, she is expressing a minority perspective. While most course participants found Nussbaum's work to be provocative in many respects, in general they did not, as did this student, take exception to her argument for the necessity of theorizing new approaches to women's well-being.

There is very little in Martha Nussbaum's article that I agree with; many elements she discusses are farfetched and virtually impossible . . . She mainly focuses on the need of reorganizing elements such as the redistribution of wealth, power, and employment on an international scale. Being a government major, I have spent many hours studying different aspects of international cooperation and do not see her ideas as being feasible at all. I do agree with her that the methods that are being used to measure a woman's liberty, such as GNP and wealth, does not show how well women are being treated or taken care of within a country. I also agree with Nussbaum's ten Central Human Function Capabilities. These are things that every person in the world should have and I think this is the strongest part of her argument. Northrup's work makes a great contribution by explaining that there is a deep relationship between mother and daughter, and that the beliefs we all

develop come from our mother's influence . . . For change to happen within a culture, the generation of new mothers must be willing to challenge the gender norms as described on the WHO website, in order for changes in women's health to occur. C. (UMD)

C., I agree with you when you say that 'For change to happen within a culture, the generation of new mothers must be willing to challenge the gender norms as described on the WHO website.' Thanks for the pointer. However, I seem to fumble with the idea that you would not find it feasible to have equality among women by focusing on the need of reorganizing elements such as the redistribution of wealth, power, and employment on an international scale. (Makerere)

C., The difference I picked up between with your reflection on Nussbaum and mine was that you did not agree with most of her ideas of reorganizing elements such as redistribution of wealth, power and employment on an international scale. Don't you think governments globally need to address why the above seems so impossible in order to work on achieving some equity amongst women and men? Why can't we work towards Nussbaum's elements if this is what is necessary to achieve women's health and well-being? If pressure is given to governments to reassess their policies and to address the imbalance that exist, it can be made feasible don't you think? While it saddens me that Nussbaum's ten human capabilities seems so out of reach, it is very clear that despite our locations or cultural differences we have ultimately the same desires to live a life free from oppression and discrimination. However, your reflection and the readings have helped me to see that women's health and well-being are not so clear cut . . . I speak from a South African context where it is virtually impossible for women to move freely from place to place or to be secure against violent assault because of our crime situation; our bodily integrity and bodily health are compromised every second of the day. (UWC)

These observations and queries prompted the student from UMD to respond:

Thank you for your responses! I reviewed what I had posted before and I can see how we would disagree. I personally would love to see a world where countries care about each other and will help countries based on their need. I think Nussbaum is reflecting her idea of a perfect utopia, but I have to stick by my comment that it would unfortunately never happen. As I am sure most of you all know, the United States

rarely takes action unless there is some sort of motivation to do so . . . However, I also think that businesses and non-governmental organizations may play a huge role in attempting to accomplish some of the ideas that Nussbaum lays out and I think this is the most feasible way of doing it. NGOs have been responsible for a wide range of programs that are at least making small steps towards providing better health and well-being programs; especially for women . . . NGOs are one example of reorganizing wealth to benefit women's well-being.

Note the ways in which student posts above provide clear evidences both from readings, and from their own lived experiences in support of the perspectives they articulated; all participants benefitted from the collective pooling and sharing of knowledge that resulted. Exchanges such as these continued to occur throughout the course as students collaborated together to construct their final projects; contestations followed this model of productive and mutually respectful engagement. Dialogic contestation concerning controversial topics would, perhaps, be more unusual in a traditional face-to-face classroom situation, in which students may feel more constrained in their interactions with each other. These opening virtual dialogues were so frequently cited in final reflective essays that one easily deduces their impact on student learning as significant. One student observed:

In a traditional classroom situation one tends not to be so challenging if one does not agree with a fellow student's standpoints and in most circumstances there is not enough time to offer your opinion on a matter you did not agree with in the classroom because of lecture time constraints. I found that one can challenge and clear up issues in the discussion forum one has with fellow students much more easily.

At the conclusion of assignment three, participants were asked to articulate how the readings, and their virtual dialogues up to this point in the course had helped them to think about their upcoming assignment to conduct a face-to-face interview

with a local woman about her experiences of health and well-being. Representative comments from students follow. A posting from a student at Makerere University is re/produced in some length to reveal the thoroughness with which she addresses this question, and the manner in which student participants engaged in synthesis through shared processes of knowledge-making. Many of these ideas were also reflected, if less well developed, in posts authored by other students.

I am H., a (female) Ugandan. After reading the reflections of my virtual classmates, I have understood that my ideas about the two terms are in agreement with my virtual classmates. We all include social aspect to be a part of health as well as well-being. Other classmates are expressing similar ideas about health and well-being and this leads me to come to a conclusion that after reading from Nussbaum, Northrup, and the WHO and UNFPA websites, we have become more similar in our understanding of health and well-being, unlike before. We have come to understand that there is a difference in connection with race, geographical context, age, ethnicity and class. From the readings one understands that health and well-being are socially and culturally constructed and it follows that women who are economically upright and educated, have access to resources and control are more likely to have better health and their well-being is enhanced; this is clearly identified from the differences among women in terms of class, age, geographical area and etc. . . . These assignments have enhanced my understanding of health and well-being to be having a big relationship between the mind and the body after reading life experiences from different virtual classmates. And this has enhanced my ability to interview a woman in my local area because I will be able to interpret and analyze the unequal imbalances existing in different cultures, races, class and geographical location which affect women differently.
(Makerere)

Six additional responses, excerpted below, note very specific ways in which participants felt that broadened perspectives developed through their participation in the first three assignments would assist them to conduct a more effective interview.

The work has enhanced my ability to interview a woman in my local area on this topic as I must now concentrate not only on physical but

also social and mental aspects as regards women's health and well-being.

Christiane Northrup discusses the need to learn how to respect your body; she suggests that we should engage our own inner wisdom in order to improve our wholeness and health. This idea about women's health and well-being helps me to broaden my perspective. In my interview, I will plan to ask and listen not only to the specific issues of a woman's physical or mental health, but also to many other aspects of her life like freedom, economic state, sense of fulfillment, work, education, relationships etc. The concrete example I can think of is my plan to interview women who suffer from eating disorder and I want to do a narrative study in order to give space to the women's own words and how they perceive the central issues and oppressions in their lives that caused them to develop the eating disorder, perhaps as a symptom that signals that something is wrong in their well-being.

Hi, S.! I haven't gotten a chance to reply to any of your postings yet, but I really enjoy them – your writing is always very energetic and refreshing. From what I pieced together, you are thirty-eight, very spiritual, very well-traveled and live in Israel. There are all areas in which we differ: Consequently, I am twenty, atheist, American, and — unfortunately — have never traveled outside my country. Your interest in spirituality really showed through in your response . . . your writings have shown me the need to recognize both women's spirituality and agency — and with this in mind, I feel much more prepared for my interview. I can now compose interview questions and conduct my interview with the mindset that women and their souls and bodies are powerful agents rather than victims of politics and economics.

Whoever I choose to interview will share my culture to some extent, but she will also probably differ in many respects, and I will seek out her concepts of health and well-being before I try to fit them into a normative frame.

These readings have deepened my perspective on the topic and broadened the issues included in it. I would learn to listen to a woman

in my community and ask her what she does, and what are the circumstances she is in-who is she taking care of, has she done any physical check-ups, how does she eat, does she want and have the opportunity to study? What are her resources personally and in her community?

I plan to interview my mother and honestly, I do not know what to expect. She spent half of her life in the Philippines living in extreme poverty. Now, she is a family physician and currently runs her own practice. After I read Nussbaum's essay – I know this is going to sound silly and naïve but, I realized that I only thought of my mother as a mother. I'm finding this difficult to articulate . . . I mean . . . I know that she is also a wife, sister, daughter, doctor – but, I honestly don't think I ever saw her as more than my mom – if that makes any sense

As is richly manifest in narratives re/representing student voices above, participants were enthusiastic about understandings they constructed in these introductory virtual dialogues with one another – about themselves, their peers, and about local and global factors relating to women's health and well-being. As course designers, we committed a generous allotment of time to these first three assignments because we were persuaded that given all of the border crossings with which students would necessarily be engaged (cultural, disciplinary, social, personal, virtual, etc.), it was incumbent upon us to allocate a considerable chunk of time to dialogic processes of community building across barriers of difference. As pedagogues, we felt it was critical to allow this time/space for participants to tap into existing situated knowledges, and to be able to compare and contrast them with those of their virtual peers before prompting them to collaborative transactions in the processes of co-constructing new knowledges. Although student feedback indicated that the relatively shortened time frame for subsequent collaborative work in small groups was a

challenge, informants were emphatic about the importance of these initial dialogues to their subsequent knowledge-making transactions.

Importantly, through their virtual dialogues, students were prompted to de-center themselves as learners, and thus to interrogate their own positions and assumptions as well as those of their peers (Michael Davidson, 2004). The stories narrated in their dialogues also manifest the ways in which these virtual transactions promoted more meaningful learning engagement with the relevant literatures which they were directed to read. From these initial dialogues, students moved into a series of connected assignments, the focus point of which was their data-gathering interviews in which they each spoke with a local woman informant about her experiences of health and well-being. These transactions are interpretively described and selectively re/represented (together with a description of how they informed their culminating projects) in Chapter Six. I conclude that chapter with re/representations of learning analyses that students constructed to evaluate their experience as members of the *Women's Health and Well-Being* course.

Endnotes

¹ Although material used in this dissertation has been touched upon in these previous projects, most of the data (and the accompanying analysis) re/produced in this dissertation has yet to be published.

² Other universities represented were Central European University, Peking University, Chinese Woman's College, Ewha Women's University and Kiemung University (both from South Korea). While it would have been ideal to have had a participating member from one of the Asian institutions on our team, groupings when possible were composed with attention to pairing scholars with similar disciplinary, teaching and research interests as well as to maximizing transnational participation in each group.

³ Other modules constructed during the 2004 institute explored (1) identities in local and global contexts, (2) feminist cultural criticism, (3) women's leadership and development, and (4) globalization's impact on women's development in China.

⁴ Participation in the module was voluntary on the part of all students who were enrolled in our 2005 courses. University of Maryland students enrolled in my course in 2005 were all freshman and sophomores and had a limited participatory role; they provided feedback for each of the culminating projects. In the 2007 course, all student participants, including those at the University of Maryland were either in their final year of undergraduate study or were already enrolled in graduate courses of study.

⁵ The open source e-learning platform at UWC has been revised since we first uploaded the 2007 course; its current iteration (KEWL.NEXTGEN) can be found at <http://www.ohloh.net/p/5081>.

⁶ Additionally, Bar-Ilan University funded a technology aide to work online with the ICT staff at UWC to upload the revised course to its new platform in time for our spring 2007 course.

⁷ The screenshot of the welcome page from our open source e-learning platform was retrieved from <http://elearn.uwc.ac.za/index.php?module=context> (2007).

⁸ Several criteria have played a factor in decisions about when and how much information to provide about aspects of identity such as the gender, university affiliation (etc.) of students authoring these texts. I have endeavored to strike a balance as to when the provision of added information would enrich the reader's understanding

of the participant exchanges, and when to omit information as less relevant. In excerpts when privacy considerations necessitated the omission of personal markers of identity, I have, at least, included institutional cohort identification where it seemed to be particularly relevant.

⁹ Jan Garrett provides a brief but useful introduction to Nussbaum's capabilities approach and framework: <http://people.wku.edu/jan.garrett/ethics/nussbaum.htm>.

Chapter Six: Virtual Collaborations – *Women’s Health and Well-Being, Transnational Perspectives*

I found the course to have been designed quite carefully and that each assignment was a building block towards the end product. Although it was not in the beginning as clear as this, towards the separation of the two groups it soon took shape for me, probably because smaller groups offer the greater opportunity for more intimate from learning and demanded a greater degree of attention of all members.

—Student, *Women’s Health and Well-Being* (2007)

Introduction

Chapter Five concluded with re/representations from dialogues constructed by virtual classmates during their first assignments in the women’s health and well-being course. Chapter Six continues with a description of the knowledge-making transactions in which students were subsequently engaged as they shifted from community-wide dialogues to cross-institutional virtual work groups. Students worked in these groups for the duration of the course in order to research and to collaboratively produce culminating projects; their findings were presented to their virtual peers via a video-conference, and posted to the course wiki.¹ As a result of their virtual transactions with transnational peers, and their collaborative engagement with feminist knowledge frameworks, many participants were prompted to examine, and to alter previously held assumptions about women’s health and well-being – challenging, deepening, and/or modifying them. Stories told by participants in and through their transactions with one another, as they co-constructed digital knowledge projects about women’s health and well-being, illuminate a shared consciousness that despite often severe access and resource constraints, and in the face of vastly different lived

experiences, participants realized unanticipated and transformative growth as learners. Chapter Six concludes with re/representations of narratives from the learning analyses authored by student participants at the conclusion of their course. Students reflected cogently upon their experiences in the course, noting both the barriers to and the rewards of successful learning engagement in the virtual classroom. While barriers identified focus chiefly on challenges with technologies, benefits described center on their technology-enabled collaborative processes of knowledge-making.

Figure 39, below, summarizes the flow of tasks across the semester. After students transitioned (virtually) into their small work groups, assignments four through eleven accounted for only a little more than half the time allocation of the entire course. However, in terms of work production, these assignments were substantively more intense than the introductory dialogues, which had been focused on building community in the virtual classroom through dialogic discovery and story-telling.² As students dialogically shared their experiences of women's health and well-being, they also began to elaborate alternative knowledges about the topic through the sharing of transnational perspectives. Working together in the production of culminating projects required students to mobilize collaborative work skills within the virtual classroom, and to identify and analyze external resources that would extend and support the articulation of these knowledges.

In co-producing culminating projects, students were required to work flexibly among knowledge contexts in communities from levels local to global. These activities included conducting qualitatively structured face-to-face interviews with

local informants, the critical analyses of these interviews, and of relevant literatures, and participation through virtual conferencing to produce a collaborative document reporting their findings. After peer review, this was posted to a digital platform. Each of these activities addressed one or more of the objectives we had identified as desirable learning outcomes.³

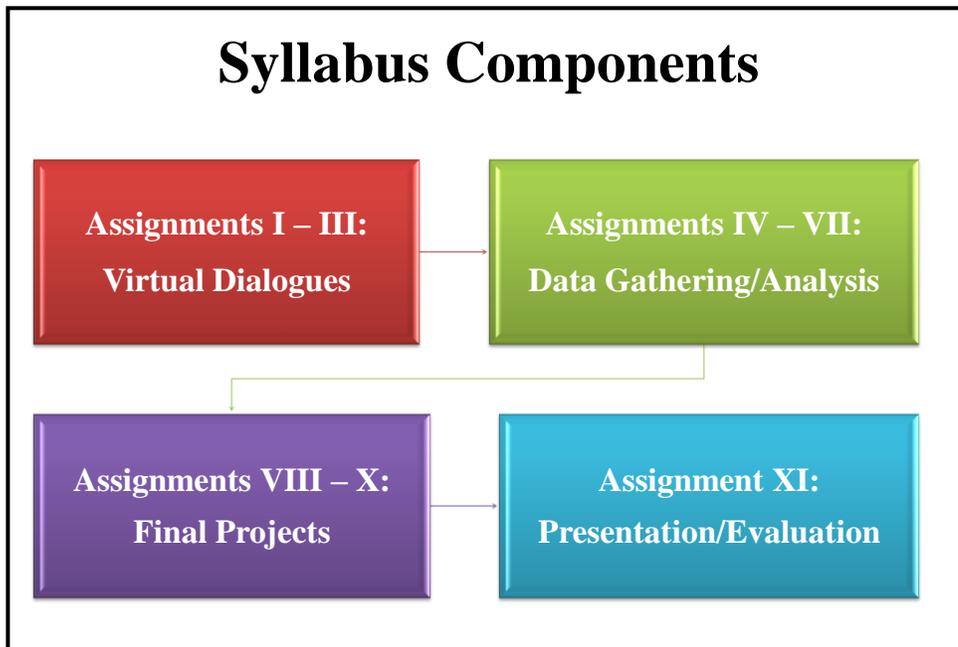


Figure 39: Syllabus

Student participation had been extremely animated throughout the initial dialogic transactions, and students remained highly engaged during their data-gathering interview (assignments four through seven). At the conclusion of their interviews, however (and despite their universal enthusiasm for using the interviews as data in their culminating projects), their anxiety about the demands of cyberspace collaboration across multiple time zones, and their concerns about the technology-intensive nature of the projects they would be producing, factored heavily into a

collective ebbing of earlier enthusiasm. These situational elements in the virtual classroom, together with occasional technology misfires, described below, temporarily slowed students' progress, and resulted in missed assignment deadlines. Fortunately, the satisfaction students experienced as they collectively shared ownership in the production of their reports, and the anticipation of presenting their findings to one another in the video-conference effectively re-energized and re-engaged them.

Discursive Constructions: Virtual Work Groups

Participant placement in their virtual work groups was chiefly based on two factors: (a) student preference of research topic, and (b) our commitment as co-instructors to preserving the transnational aspect of participant collaborations as broadly as possible in each work group. The instructor whose own research interests were most closely aligned with the group topic facilitated each work group. However, all facilitators served as resources to students on other teams as needed. Figure 40, below, summarizes the distribution of students cross-institutionally within the four work groups. As is evident, all groups do not have the same number of participants. Because we wished each student to have their first or second choice of a research topic, even at the expense of complete geographic diversity in each group, the social well-being group was the smallest learning community. No students from Bar-Ilan University were placed in the social well-being group because each of the five students enrolled there were studying at the Ph.D. level, and thus had the most well-defined research interests, none of which were primarily focused on the topic of social well-being. However, the social well-being group did have two of the male participants in

the course; their participation brought a significant diversity of perspectives to the group's collaborative work. And, even though there were no male participants allocated to the mental health group, it was the largest of the work groups as it was the first choice for many of the female students. Its broad geographic diversity was felt to be a valued diversity factor, notwithstanding the lack of male group members.

Institutional Cohort Representation in Work Groups					
Total Students (Male Students)					
	TOTAL	Bar Ilan University	Makerere University	University of Maryland	University of Western Cape
Bodily Integrity (facilitated by Kimberlee)	9 (3)	1	5 (3)	2	1
Mental Health (facilitated by Rivka)	11	2	2	4	3
Reproductive Health & Sexuality (facilitated by Grace)	8 (1)	1	4 (1)	2	1
Social Well-Being (facilitated by Vivienne)	5 (2)	0	1(1)	3	1(1)

Figure 40: Institutional Cohort Representation in Work Groups

Discursive Constructions: Interviews with Local Informants

Figure 41, below, provides a summary of assignments four through seven as students prepared for, conducted, and reflected upon interviews with local informants about their experiences of health and well-being. After first reading protocols about how to conduct a qualitative interview, each student posted potential interview questions to their group's workspace on the KEWL platform, receiving feedback from peers and facilitators. Participants then selected from among the posted questions, and

conducted a face-to-face interview with a female informant of their choice. Each student posted an edited transcript of their interview in their group's online workspace, along with a guided journal reflection about the experience. Finally, students were directed to read at least two interviews conducted by other members of their group, and to prepare a preliminary list of the major themes about women's experiences of health and well-being they noted in reading the interview transcripts.⁴ The interviews were a vital component of the research data base that students amassed in constructing culminating projects reporting on women's experiences of health and well-being comparatively and transnationally.

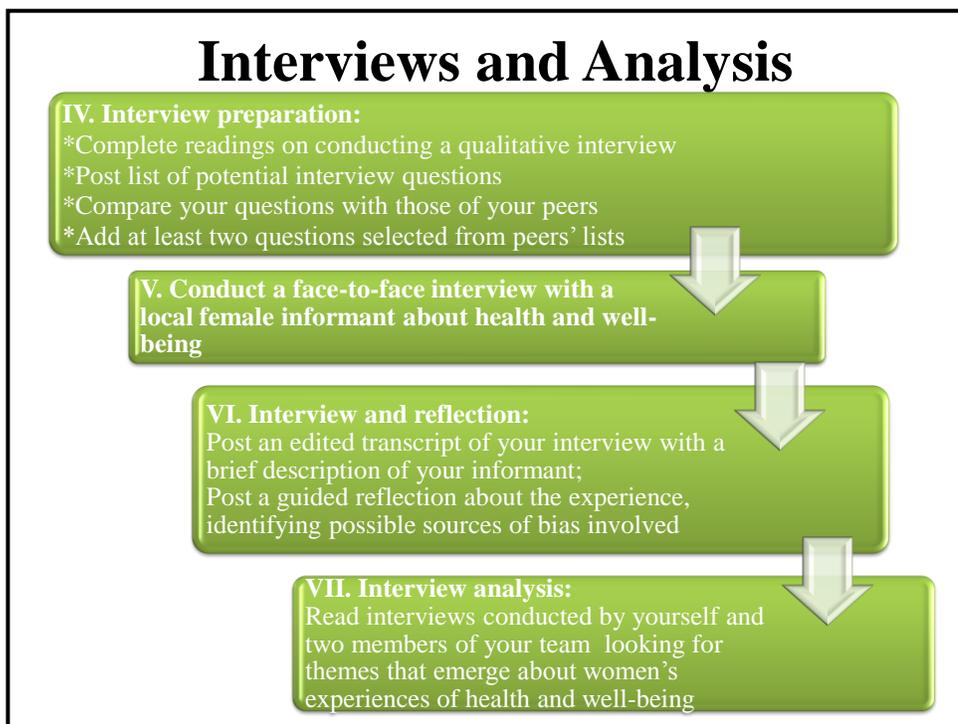


Figure 41: Tasks for Conducting and Analyzing Interviews

Relationships between the interviewers and their interviewees are summarized in figure 42. Familial relationships included mothers, sisters and aunts. Students

interviewing their mothers were all part of the University of Maryland cohort, while all of the other kinship relationships were between informants and interviewers from the other three universities. Friends were selected as informants as often as relatives. Students from each of the four institutions were equally likely to select colleagues, friends, or roommates as their interview informants.

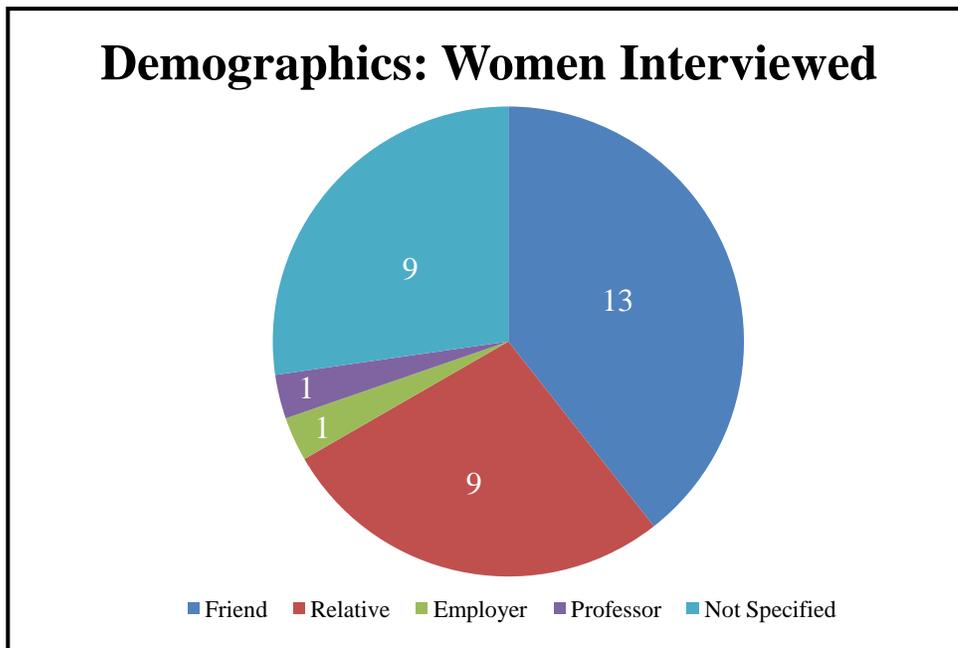


Figure 42: Demographics of Women Interviewed

Excerpts re/represented below illustrate the richness of the interviewees' lives, and the diversity of their experiences of health and well-being; they are a selective sampling of the narratives that students constructed to "introduce" their interview informants to other course participants, and were posted as part of the culminating projects. The university affiliation of the interviewer is in parentheses at the end of each narrative excerpt. Even in these brief excerpts, which vividly illustrate the variety

of factors affecting women's health to have emerged from interviews, one factor emerged as the most salient. Consistent across all geographic, social, and cultural contexts for interview informants no longer in their twenties was that all were heavily involved in care-taking of family members, while working full or part-time outside of the home. Many of these informants, even those with post-secondary schooling, appeared to be under-employed as a result of their care-taking responsibilities; most felt that their role as care-takers had adversely affected their personal situation of health and well-being.

Discursive Voices: The Informants

Friends

I chose to interview "G", a 51 years old married woman and a mother of three because in a symbolic way, the two of us constitute an wholeness through de-constructing of the concept "womanhood". While G embodies the concept of "womanhood" and "proper womanhood", I chose to remain "childfree". Therefore, from a feminist point of view, the two of us personify options of multiplicity, the ability to undermine societal and patriarchal dogmas and role models. G got married to her "high school sweetheart". She published her first poetry book last year, at the age of 50. G defines herself "as a mother and wife". As opposed to her, I define myself first and foremost as a writer and editor, not as a wife. (Bar-Ilan)

I interviewed my roommate. She is an amazing and inspirational person. She just recently graduated from UMD with a journalism degree and is currently working for The Washington Post. She is very intelligent and well-spoken. She is also very creative. (UMD)

Relatives

My interviewee was my sister. She is 25, single, Jewish by formality but identifies herself as "has no religion", and a high-school graduate. At present, she works in Florida, USA, as a store manager. She takes

her hobby of photographing very seriously and hopes to one day be a professional photographer. In the meantime she takes various professional courses. She is very political in her ideals and activities. Most of her present photographs were taken in the occupied territories, expressing the suffering of Palestinians – especially Palestinian women. I work as a youth counselor in a boarding school, which is the home of 260 underprivileged children (ages 12-18) with various problems. I am a very active feminist, as well as active politically. We are both bilingual – grew up in a Hebrew & English speaking home (my mother is Israeli, my father is Canadian). (Bar-Ilan)

My interviewee that is my aunt is a 55 year old colored lady employed as a sale lady in a second hand shop in Wellington 100km from Cape Town. She is married and has got five grown up children and stays with her husband and her youngest daughter aged 24 at home. They live in an urban area and her husband is employed as a plumber at the local municipality. She speaks English and Afrikaans; their home language is Afrikaans. Her highest level of education is Grade 8; they had to leave school early to financially assist their parents and were previously disadvantaged during the apartheid era. She's an obese woman that suffers from hypertension. (UWC)

The lady I interviewed is my aunt and housemate. She is from Zimbabwe as well which already makes us closer being from the same country living in the Diaspora. She is 40 this year and she is a single mother of two. She is a lawyer by profession and is currently working at a conflict resolution centre facilitating workshops internationally. We believe in the same religion in this case Christianity. We also attend the same place of fellowship in our religion. We speak the same language Shona and we both are from a middle class background. We both are black or African in race as one may choose to define it. (UWC)

I interviewed my mother, a fifty-four-year-old registered nurse. She was born in Lucena, a town in the Philippines . . . She moved to the United States and lived in New York City for about twenty years. Her husband is Filipino and Spanish. Although she adapted to the American lifestyle, many of the values she has are still those from the Philippines. (UMD)

My mother is a forty-nine-year-old government worker. She was raised Catholic but is nonreligious. Her husband is Jewish. She has three daughters, the oldest of which is from her previous marriage. She graduated high school but did not attend college. She is on many medications and has experienced many health problems, particularly arthritis. (UMD)

Colleagues

The lady I interviewed is a 35 year old lady living in Cape Town and married with two children. She speaks English and Xhosa. She currently works as a nurse alongside of me. She is a colleague and an outspoken woman at that. She strongly believes in advancing herself even with the challenges and lack of support she faces at times. She speaks her mind and often challenges the status quo at her workplace. She is an enthusiastic, hardworking lady and self motivated. (UWC)

Others

R. is 43 years old. She is the young sister of my best friend. She was born at New York to ex-Israeli parents. She worked as a successful lawyer, but about 8 years ago she decided to leave her occupation and she and her husband came to Israel and they are running an independent business. R. has no family in Israel. She has two young daughters. I asked R to do the interview because I thought it is interesting to hear how she manages being a relatively "old" working mother. And how the stressful period impact her health, mental health and well being. (Bar-Ilan)

My Interviewee is called Faith (not her real name). She is a married woman aged 37years. She is a Munyarwanda by tribe but married to a Mukiga from Kabale District. They have three children, two boys and one girl. I got to know her at the university. She is a Graduate Bachelors degree from Makerere University. She is self-employed on her farms. (Makerere)

My informant is a Ugandan woman that I have come to know and respect as a mother figure. She is in her late thirties, married and has

three children. She works as a teacher but is also currently furthering her studies. She is a strict Catholic and is very talkative and assertive. She views herself as liberated and free from cultural obstacles that hinder many women in her society. (Makerere)

My informant is a fifty-five-year-old Caucasian American woman with three children. Her husband, from whom she is separated, currently lives in the Middle East. She is not religious but her husband is a Moslem, which has partially been the source of many marital issues. She still feels that her husband uses his position to oppress and harass, and this frustration is evident when she talks about him. She feels very strongly about politics, especially about her belief that women need to be heard in society. She has a college degree and was, at one point, enrolled in a master's program. She has worked in the past, but has not been able to work for a very long time due to care-giving obligations and personal health issues; she has suffered extreme stress as a result of many of the situations she has endured in her life. (UMD)

Student Reflections: The Interview Process

When we focus on the interviews collected, we find out that there are different transcultural perspectives about women's health and well-being; however despite age, race, color, geographical location all women are affected in their daily experiences. Women face different problems of violence exemplified by poverty, no power to make decisions, access to resources, gendered division of labor, being battered by husbands . . . cultures both compromise and enhance women's bodily integrity.

— Student reflection, *Women's Health and Well-Being* (2007)

In designing the syllabus, we anticipated that assignments would scaffold shared understandings of lived experiences, and of feminist literatures theorizing women's health and well-being, and that these understandings would prompt students to theorize transnational applications of scholarly frameworks. In the comments re/represented below, authored by students as part of their final learning analyses, their reflections indicate satisfaction about the degree to which they felt well-prepared for

the interview assignment after having completed earlier assignments. They also indicate that their understandings of transnational theoretical frameworks were materially transformed as they engaged in the constructivist praxis and multi-sensorial knowledge-making transactions that were prompted in the interview assignment,

Interviewing women about their health and well-being was challenging. . . The preparation for the interviews assisted us to conduct the interviews professionally, training us to be flexible and to follow ethics, for example, in building trust.

The interview opened a door which hitherto had been difficult to open. At the end of our discussions my interviewee expressed the need to write about her experience. That to me was the beginning of a healing process for her. I felt fulfilled doing that for her. Her interview also spurred me to research about health practices in my country.

I think the single most valuable thing about this course was being able to conduct a qualitative interview with a woman about her health, and being able to read my classmate's interviews. I learned the most out of this activity. Being able to read my classmate's interviews was extremely revealing.

Information extracted from different interviews indicated the majority of women perceive health as only the absence of disease in the body, and this puts women in a very vulnerable state. For example the majority of women (are) living under cultures that harm or violate their bodily integrity, like female genital mutilation, and will take it as normal, and some are even proud about it.

One of the most illuminating experiences was reading the interviews that were conducted in Africa because they used such candor in describing the daily interactions that affect gender issues.

These interviewees' responses were important because they served as way to inform myself and my classmates about the society that we are living in globally. It is easy to walk away from something or ignore something that does not directly affect you because you live on the other side of the hemisphere. The responses from the interviews brought me closer to these women . . . and while I still feel that there is not much that I can do, perhaps this class is a way for us to start helping by recognizing the problems and asking questions to understand the situations of these women . . . I learned . . . that some women's bodies are put at risk and there is little they can do about it.

One of the most significant themes revealed in the interviews was that the obligation and burden of being a caretaker typically becomes the responsibility of women. This situation is very common across the globe because men exploit cultural dictates, applying stereotypical gender biases that justify the unequal distribution of care-giving responsibilities. Based on my interview, it is also evident that stereotypical gender roles and gender bias result from repressive social and cultural traditions. These social constructs directly relate to social justice issues that perpetuate inequality and limit women's progress.

After reading my classmates' interviews and analyzing the themes presented across them, I gained an appreciation of women's experiences transculturally. I realized that although the United States has progressed, there don't seem to be any countries that have truly achieved gender equality. The assignment also did a great job of highlighting gender-based power struggles and how socio-cultural dynamics shape gender inequalities. They also highlighted how undervalued the work is that is traditionally the responsibility of women. Finally, the interview assignment demonstrated that although women's experiences are individual and vary greatly based on culture, class, age, etc., there is common ground cross-nationally.

Student reflections about their experiences of these interviews also highlight their awareness that themes about health and well-being cited by interview informants (such as the prevalence of socio-cultural barriers to women's abilities to experience positive health and well-being), were resonant with their own lived experiences; many

had been referenced in earlier dialogues. However, as they encountered these themes in their interviews, students were prompted to deepened connections between their classroom dialogues and relevant literatures. The following list of themes was compiled by students as part of their analyses of one another's interviews; each was in some way the focus of further research and analysis in at least one of the culminating projects.

- Distinctively local cultural constructs on women's health and well-being
- The impacts of constructs of gender across cultural contexts on women's bodily integrity, including
 - Sexual powerlessness
 - Violence against women
- Gendered inequalities in socio-economic contexts as impacting access to resources
 - Women are not allowed to control and even inherit property in some contexts
 - Women are not allowed to find gainful employment in some contexts
 - Community well-being versus individual well-being
- Gendered inequalities with respect to care-taking responsibilities
- Implications of the spread of HIV /AIDS to women and subsequent effects on children
- Spirituality and women's experiences of health and well-being
- Fear of illness
- Impact of physical appearance on women's health and well-being
- Women's gendered health limitations i.e. pregnancy
- Mental/Physical/Emotional Stability
- Women's health needs differing from men's health, which is the normative health construction
- How gendered divisions of labour affect women's health and makes them more vulnerable to ill health
- Women's health and well-being is highly susceptible to and variable with respect to their experiences of violence and poverty
- Women's dependency on men for their health matters

Situational analysis of empirical data from student interviews poignantly illuminated for me the astute awareness women across geographic contexts manifest of social factors affecting their compromised health status, even if they are unable to take

actions that would address or remediate them. A common expression threaded throughout the interviews and the projects which developed around them was a determined sense of hope that a commitment to working together to provide women with education, including better choices of and access to “best practices” health resources may eventually lead to more positive health outcomes for women across geographic contexts.

Discursive Collaborations: Producing Culminating Projects

After posting their interview transcripts, and their preliminary analyses of data generated from interviews, students in each of the work groups gathered virtually for a synchronous planning meeting. The primary purpose of this synchronous “chat” was to discuss interview material judged to be most relevant to developing their collaborative research project, and to decide how to complete each of the required features of the project (summarized in figure 43, below). Through synchronous chat, students developed an outline and a project timeline to assist them in conducting research, compiling and writing up results, and in peer editing/reviewing one another’s contributions in a timely manner. As facilitators, we moderated the chat and helped students to allocate the tasks. Following initial chat sessions, students continued to work in both synchronous and asynchronous modes (with instructor support and facilitation as needed) in collaborating to produce their group projects.

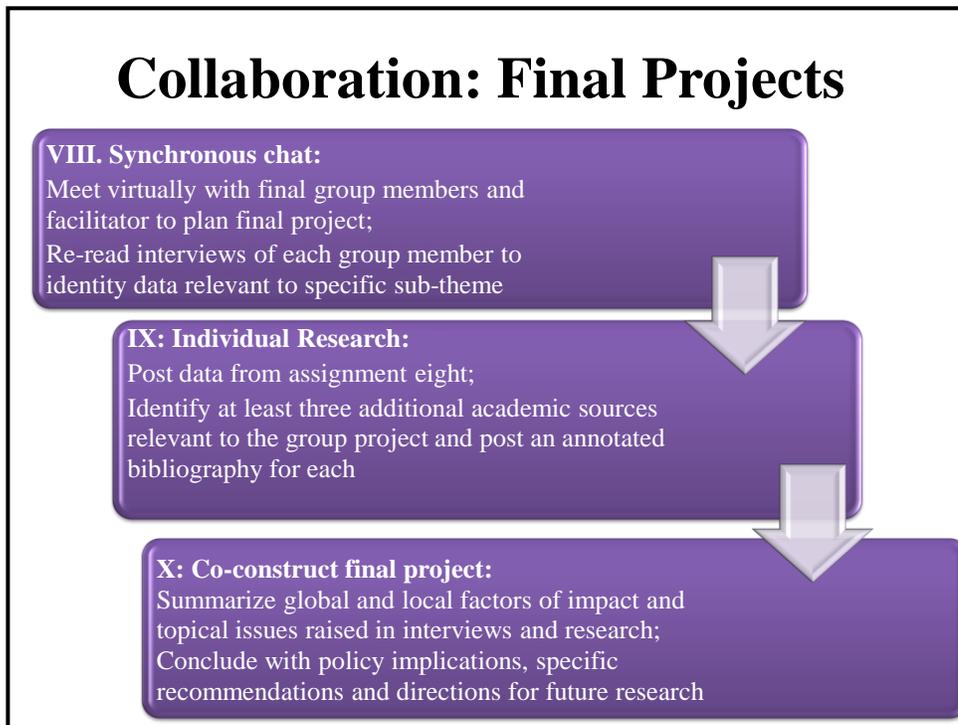


Figure 43: Collaboration – Final Projects

Each group explored one of four topics asserted by Martha Nussbaum to have significant impact universally on women’s experiences of health and well-being; these topics were bodily integrity, mental health, reproductive health and sexuality, and social well-being. Using themes identified in the open-ended interviews as their starting point, each group targeted their research to specific sub-themes within these broader topics. Each portion of the project was required to have at least two group members working collaboratively to generate a draft document, which was then reviewed by other team members.

As part of their process, students were directed to identify outside research sources, which were used, together with analysis of interview data, to establish a general contextual background for women’s health with respect to their research topic.

Groups were prompted to consider topics about women's health and well-being as expressed in their own local situations, as well as globally. Participants collaboratively wrote analyses of research, described existing health policies and practices with respect to their topic, and produced recommended future policies that, if implemented locally or globally, would have a positive impact on women's health and well-being.

The requirements of the group project, both in terms of content and collaboration, were admittedly ambitious on our part. Even the most academically advanced students found the process to be challenging, particularly given the unanticipated technology challenges that hampered their transnational collaborations – even as digital technologies enabled their virtual processes of knowledge-making. Students also found the sustained commitment of time and effort required across geographic contexts and multiple time zones to be productive, but draining, in its intensity. These elements were further exacerbated by the relatively short time frame allocated for the project, necessitated in part by differing semester start and end dates among the four institutions.⁵ Despite these multiple constraining elements, and although many students indicated that they wished more time had been allowed to permit them to engage their topic more deeply, all groups developed successful projects. Indeed, despite adverse technology experiences further described and documented in crystallized re/representations from students' learning analyses later in the chapter, the degree of student commitment to collaborative process in the production of these projects, which were posted to a wiki hosted at the University of Maryland, was singularly impressive.⁶

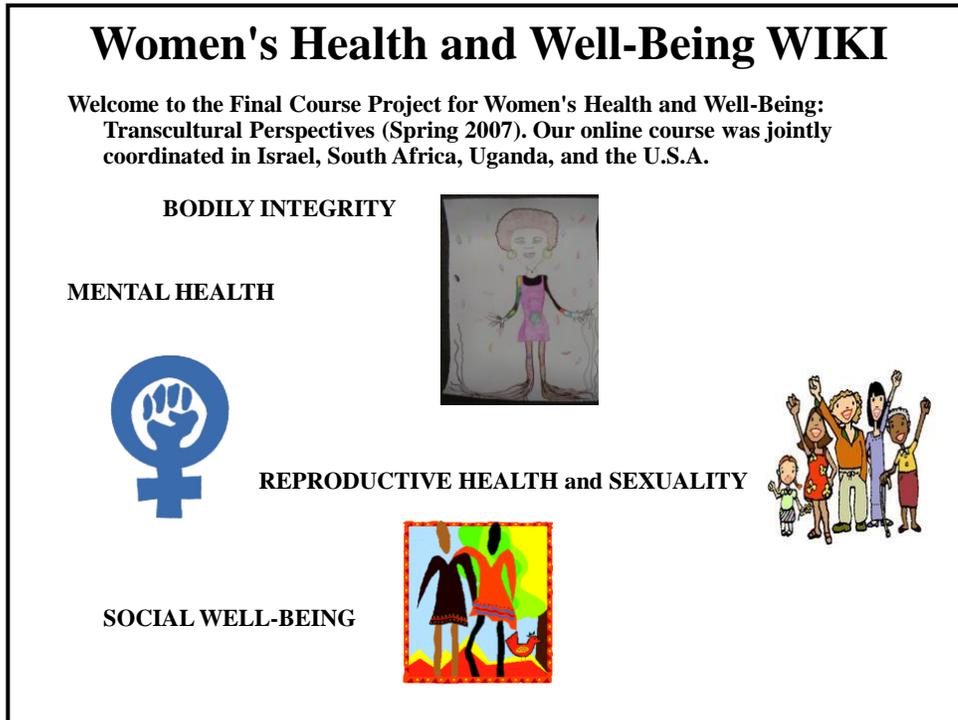


Figure 44: Screen Capture – Project Wiki

Projects developed by student groups demonstrated both a thorough engagement with existing theoretical frameworks, and deepened understandings of their research topics as they related to women’s experiences of health and well-being transnationally. Each project also provided astutely incisive recommendations for policy and practice changes at levels both local and global. Interweaving feminist scholarship together with their own analyses of interview data, participants theorized new knowledges that were not only highly relevant to each of their local geographic contexts but which were also transgressively other to dominant knowledge hegemonies about women’s gendered experiences of health and well-being globally. Although a more thorough analysis of the culminating projects is outside the scope of

this dissertation, even a cursory examination reveals a common and strongly shared insistence on the need to use a transnational lens in engaging women’s experiences of health and well-being. Having posted their projects to the course wiki, students approached the final series of tasks, which included sharing their knowledge projects with their virtual peers in the course video-conference, with great anticipation. Figure 45 summarizes the components of this final assignment.

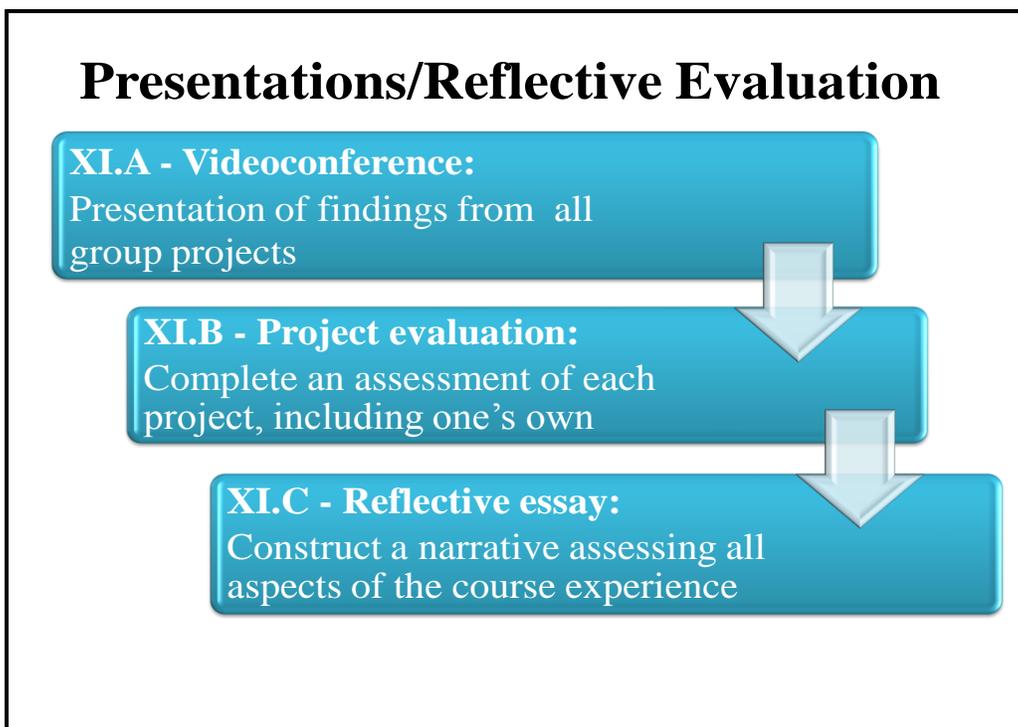


Figure 45: Assignment 11

Discursive Knowledge-Sharing: Video-Conference Presentations

The culminating aspect of the final project, and indeed, in many ways of the course itself, was the video-conference. The University of Maryland’s state-of-the-art video-conference center’s split screen projection system permitted us to virtually

convene participants from all four centers in real time. Our use of the video-conference center was supported by funds remaining in the Ford Foundation grant, supplemented with a “DRIF” award (Designated Research Initiative Fund) from the College of Humanities at the University of Maryland. These funds also supported IT staffing at each of the other three universities to prepare for the video-conference. Preparations for the video-conference, which was held in April, actually began in January 2007, a full month before the course itself commenced.⁷ Funding allowed us to advertise the video-conference in each university community, and to stream the presentation live during the videoconference. The video-conference was also available online for one month following the event. A publicity poster (see figure below) was created and shipped to each of the universities.



Figure 46: Video-Conference Poster

This poster, created by Catherine Nichols (at the University of Maryland's graphics center), used two of the university's signature colors. White text identified the participating faculty from each of the four centers and described the transnational premise of the course. Nichols' design concept celebrated the hope embodied in the course. The tree symbolized its collaborative pedagogy. The singing bird perched on one of the (as yet) bare branches suggests optimism that this and future collaborations concerning women's health will nurture an awareness of the need for more equitable policies and structures at levels local, transnational, and global. As was subsequently acknowledged by participants, the transnational knowledge-sharing occurring in the video-conference promoted exactly this awareness for many.

At the 90 minute video-conference, each student briefly presented a portion of his or her project findings. Due to the difference in time zones, the conference was held at the beginning of the University of Maryland work day (8:00 am) and at the close of the work day in Cape Town, South Africa. Despite the occurrence of last minute technology issues (which by now had come to seem inevitable), students found their participation to be absolutely exhilarating – even those from Bar-Ilan who were able to participate only via a sound link for much of the time. A representative

sampling of their reflections is briefly excerpted below; further comments about the video-conference experience are reproduced later in the chapter, together with other re/representations culled from student learning analyses. Reflected in these and in subsequent texts is the profoundly affective and multi-modal quality of participants' shared learning experiences.

That videoconference made me see the power that can be wielded by women working together. To see my classmates from around the world and to see the publication of our work online has given me deep fulfilment. I feel the power of togetherness. (UWC)

Very many of us had a good time in the videoconference and we experienced what we had never in our lives and this was good for us all. (Makerere)

I want to elaborate more on the videoconference. I have never experienced anything like it before. It was already interesting to me that I would be in a class with students not just from my school but from other schools across the world. The opportunity to actually speak with them and see them on video simultaneously was an amazing and historical experience. It spoke to the advancement of technology in this day in age and to the determination of the teachers who worked hard to make this happen. (Bar-Ilan)

The videoconference was AWESOME. I really enjoyed verbally communicating my thoughts with all of the students in the course. (UMD)

The videoconference was one of the coolest classroom experiences I've ever had! It was so exciting to finally get to see the people behind the wonderful posts that I had been reading. What an amazing concept – classes from several different countries meeting up to discuss issues about women's health and well-being and ways of enhancing them. I

wish we could have had more of these – perhaps at the beginning and at the end of the course – but I understand that these videoconferences are extremely costly so is probably not feasible. (UMD)

The conference was such a tangibly collaborative and so unique a learning experience for participants that it more than exceeded expectations for all involved, including the facilitators and other faculty who were in attendance at each of the centers. Perhaps the most extraordinary revelation of the video-conference for participants was its discursive articulation of authentic border crossings enacted through the virtual performance of technologies and humans together. Obviously, the main borders were geographic – students from four countries were virtually present together as they shared their co-constructed knowledges about women’s health and well-being. But the conference also enabled an instance of bridging between teachers and students, as all democratically contributed their insights to this analysis. Together with earlier dialogues, and the community building and bridging that occurred among participants through collaborating on the projects, the video-conference facilitated students’ collective participation in transnational knowledge-making. Shared knowledge included stories of similar health challenges faced by women across the world, as well as illustrations of the profound differences and disparities existing in women’s experiences of health and well-being at levels both local and global.

Presenters in the video-conference cited a range of factors as having an impact on women’s health and well-being; these included issues of gender bias, lack of knowledge, education and resources, and the resistance of institutional and governmental structures to change. These were generously supported with research

and illustrated with relevant examples. Narrative excerpts re/represented below summarize findings from each work group that were discussed at the video-conference with respect to barriers to, and/or future policy recommendations for women's enhanced experiences of health and well-being; these texts are part of the culminating projects archived on the course wiki.

Bodily Integrity:

Women's dependency on men for their health matters affects them negatively as they cannot make their own choices. For example it is often the husbands or partners who decide when, how and where women and children will receive treatment . . . Women lack information, education, skills, support, and services needed to make responsible decisions about their health, well-being and bodily integrity that would be consistent with their own values. It has been noted that women in developed countries have better health seeking behaviors as compared to the developing ones. However, as is also noted . . . even in developed countries many women without sufficient income, education, or access to resources are forced to choose between access to health resources and other basic needs for themselves or for their families. In general, women suffer a severe lack of appropriate and accessible sexual and reproductive health services, which although most severe in the African context, is nonetheless, also highly problematic in the other geographic locations as well.

Mental Health:

Many barriers and obstacles stand in the way of achieving changes in policies and practices. In developing countries, there is a lack of willingness on the part of the government to provide funding for research projects. Other barriers include issues of ethics, capability, accessibility, accountability and accuracy. Difficulties in implementing government policies mean that many have ended up on paper and are more rhetoric than reality. We suggest thinking about the world as a community, rather than a world separated by nations. Changing the way we think about our political connections provide a wider range of possibilities. We hope our module encourages others to actively engage in the production and propagation of knowledge of the cultural and political implications of women and mental health.

Reproductive Health/HIV/Aids:

In every setting, women are more vulnerable than men to HIV/AIDS; this results from many intersecting factors . . . The best policies may include enhancing women's decision-making positions in all spheres of political, social and economic nature, both in the domestic and public sphere . . . However, we caution that local, regional, national, and transnational organizations would face barriers while implementing such policies . . . such as having inadequate resources, gender stereotypes which contribute a lot to women's views and likes as well as men's, strong attachment to different cultural values and political instability, including lack of or inadequate governmental support for policy implementation.

Social Well-Being:

The issue of well-being is often obscured by the emphasis on health. The concept of women's well-being should be expanded . . . The impact of gender bias on women's lives must be included in health research to attain knowledge of the health and well being of women . . . There is lack of data on what compromises or enhances a women's well being, especially in Africa . . . information should be collected at all levels, and should be disaggregated by age, sex, gender, and other relevant social groupings such as ethnicity or social-economic class. Qualitative data may indicate problems with the provision of services, which are not illustrated by quantitative rates. Women need to be educated about their basic human rights so they can enhance their social well-being.

Discursive Voices: Student Learning Analyses

Following the videoconference, students completed the final tasks of the course. These included evaluations of their own collaborative project experience, and providing feedback on the projects produced by the other teams. Students were also directed to compose a learning analysis of not more than 1200 words reflecting on their individual degree of participation in the course. They were asked to highlight what they perceived to have been the most striking aspects of their learning.

Participants were invited (but not required) to comment upon any other aspects of the course syllabus and design that seemed relevant to them, and to submit critiques and suggestions for further iterations of the course. The entire assignment, including the video-conference, was worth 10% of the total course grade. Thus it was to our considerable astonishment and delight that we received evaluations and essays that far exceeded assignment requirements (and our own expectations) both in their rich detail, and in their overwhelmingly positive and insightful reflections about their course learning experiences.

In these final comments, students constructed thoughtful analyses about the collaborative knowledge-building processes of the course, as well as the degree to which they found the experience to have been a deeply engaging one. Their reflections indicate that because students perceived their assignments to be authentically meaningful, particularly in terms of transnational knowledge-building, they were willing to work collaboratively (with supportive facilitation) despite substantive obstacles, such as time constraints and technology access issues. Figure 47, below, graphs the relative occurrence of the key topics about which students wrote in their essays. A representative sampling selected from students' narratives follows for each of the four elements most frequently cited: technologies, course design, assessment, and collaborative process.

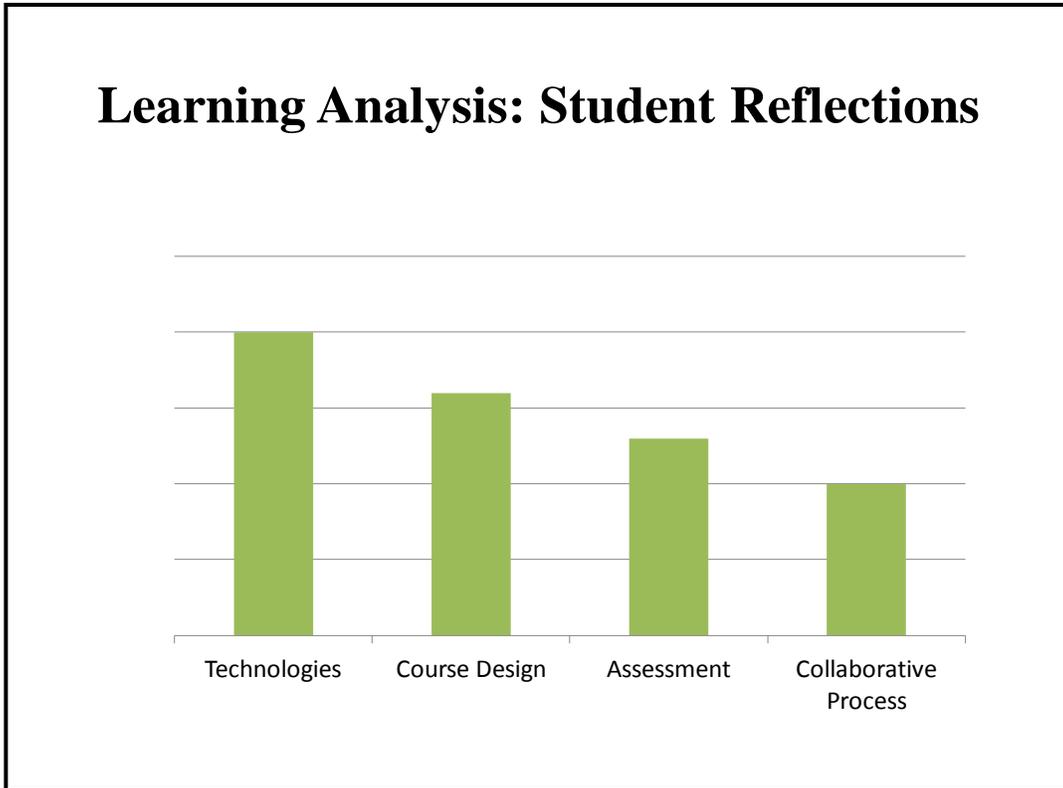


Figure 47: Reflections – Assignment 11

Reflections: Technologies

Introducing critical questions of resource availability and access, stories told by student informants challenge notions that the deployment of digital technologies, in and of themselves, erase inequitable access to knowledge-making opportunities among “newly native” digital learners. Although concerns of access were clearly heightened in this particular transnational e-collaboration (bringing together participants from institutions on both sides of the north/south development divide), student narratives strongly suggest the need of a broader lens – one that acknowledges not only the still deeply persistent nature of the north/south digital divide, but also the issues of inequity and incommensurability relevant to any technology-rich learning environment (Joseph

Kamugisha, 2007; Simone Volet & Marold Wosnitza, 2004). Despite strenuous efforts by academics and IT support staff to construct as seamlessly smooth a technology-enabled learning environment as possible, our transnational collaborations were punctuated by a range of technology-related disruptions that demanded burdensome labor on the part of all participants to resolve.

Student narratives reflect considerable frustration with the broad array of technology challenges and constraints that affected their communication within the virtual classroom – even as they acknowledged that technology was a critical element in enabling and shaping their transnational and collaborative learning praxis. Many students expressed a general dissatisfaction with the slow response time and perceived clumsiness of the navigational features of KEWL, the open source e-learning platform on which our course was hosted. Two larger issues, however, appear to have been even more widely experienced as problematic elements for students: (1) the lack of adequate technology infrastructure and resource access at their respective institutions, and (2) the lack of sufficiently responsive institutional trouble-shooting support with IT issues when they occurred. While students were appreciative of the opportunity technology afforded them to participate in the course, they were not only frustrated but severely hampered by these issues.⁸ Nonetheless, although students were frank in describing these shortcomings, their estimation of the impact on their learning collaborations was actually less harsh than my own. While I was often both remorseful and indignant at the ways in which I perceived students to have been needlessly hampered by these continuing technology issues, feeling a sense of guilt for their

struggles, they consistently qualified their own description of these pitfalls with unqualified enthusiasm for the opportunities the course afforded them to learn “by doing together” across virtual borders.

Challenges detailed by students remain problematic in virtual learning environments, even at the present moment – particularly (but not exclusively) at institutions in the global south. Each time that we co-taught an iteration of this course (2005, 2007, 2010), we attempted to ensure that participants would have nominal access to comparable support resources, tools, and technologies at each of their respective institutions. However, for most of these participants (including some at the most ‘developed’ institution, the University of Maryland), university computer labs were their only reliable source of computer access. Students at all institutions discovered to our collective dismay that university computer labs were frequently unavailable at the odd times that synchronous communications needed to be scheduled across multiple time zones. At some of the institutions, even this limited access was curtailed by external factors. Within the twelve week course, these factors included government and institutional budget shortfalls that temporarily closed labs entirely, frequent power interruptions and outages, university labor strikes, and other types of local political unrest.⁹ In these instances, many students had to resort to using local internet cafes.

Although virtual design options on the KEWL platform were relatively limited, and students found them confusing at times, it was primarily our failure as designers to understand the potential of these larger issues to disrupt collaborative knowledge-

building processes that most struck us as we analyzed student feedback. An example that has yet to be satisfactorily resolved (as is, unfortunately, the case with many of the technology issues identified by students) concerns complications that arose in participating in synchronous chats. Too often, despite our best efforts to preview problems that might arise, support staff proved unable to quickly resolve chat issues – whether it was making a lab available for chats, or having a staff person on call. While IT support was requested in advance to support chats, and to trouble shoot problems, in many cases it took the IT staff hours or days to figure out what caused an issue during a chat, or how to address it. And although IT support staff had assured us in advance of the ability of their systems and staff to handle the demands of synchronous chat, and systems checks indicated that each university had the nominal capacity (speed/disc storage/memory, etc.) to handle a synchronous chat involving fewer than a dozen participants, unforeseen obstacles such as the differing types and layers of security (firewalls, etc.) slowed chat times at best, and made them largely impenetrable in the worst scenarios reported by some participants.¹⁰ Even students using their own computing systems to engage in group chats from outside of university computer labs were adversely affected by many of these issues, including slow response times, despite the space (university or otherwise) in which they were physically located as virtual participants.¹¹

While the too-frequent unreliability of the KEWL platform to support real time text chat for students, particularly for those participating from outside the UWC institution, remained consistently problematic, difficulty conducting transnational real

time chat extends beyond the KEWL infrastructure. Indeed, our experiences as collaborating academics, using a variety of IT tools and platforms to conduct synchronous chat from our dispersed geographic locations, have been, like those of our students, less-than-satisfactory. These and other technology issues never adequately resolved during our teaching of the *Women's Health and Well-Being* course served to strongly illuminate for us the overall inadequacy of technology infrastructure and staffing at participating institutions of higher learning in the support of faculty working to use technology tools for classroom teaching purposes. These difficulties were exacerbated, as is often the case for faculty attempting to utilize digital technologies, by the fact that none of us had enough experience using technologies in classroom teaching to be able to interface very effectively with IT support staff in describing or adequately understanding the issues we encountered.

Technological “glitches” notwithstanding, participants emphasized the value of synchronous chat experiences to their collaborative knowledge-building transactions. It allowed them to establish a sense of rapport with their virtual peers at the beginning of their group collaboration, and to subsequently exchange feedback with one another as they allocated and completed responsibilities for their culminating project. This opportunity to virtually “hear” and to be “heard” in something approximating real time was viewed by students in hindsight as an almost necessary pre-requisite to their abilities to build pathways of communication that were sufficient to support the production of what was for many their first collaborative cyber project.

Unfortunately, as students moved through the process of creating their projects and posting them on the wiki site, they continued to experience a range of technology-usage problems that strained, rather than facilitated, their collaborative processes of knowledge-building. It was not that students were afraid to experiment with new technologies. Indeed, they were eager to do so. But many of them had less experience with newer digital technologies than we had imagined, and even those who had some experience of them had generally used them as consumers of rather than as producers of knowledge. All of these issues were compounded by a brisk time schedule to get projects ready for the scheduled video-conference. As their “official” conduits of technology access were curtailed in unanticipated ways by our failure to preview institutional and structural inadequacies, students often lost precious time in seeking other avenues of online communication. As a result, students were unable to meet deadlines, and in the push to mobilize tech support for them, our own abilities to trouble shoot other issues needing facilitation, and to provide timely feedback in marking assignments was compromised. Although many students would, understandably, have preferred that we lighten the demands of the remaining tasks to compensate for lost time, as we consulted together we felt that to do so would be to compromise the integrity of their transnational knowledge-building projects, and thus strip the course of its transformative potential. Students proved to be remarkably resilient in the face of these challenges, however, and were resourceful in overcoming obstacles. Nonetheless, as their texts indicate, students were perhaps most troubled by

the ways in which these issues interfered with their ability to work collaboratively with their virtual peers.

The use of e-learning is superb despite its challenges but efforts should continue to be made to accommodate those with limited access. (UWC)

There were many challenges; a major one was access to a fast and reliable internet facility. Living in a small city that has only two internet cafes which break down frequently, are overcrowded and sometimes fail to connect to the ISP is highly problematic for this module. This needs stressing to new students from resource-poor countries. (UWC)

Due to no access to computers at our convenience, some aspects of the module have been a problem. Otherwise the assignments could be accessed whenever one gets a computer and activities were quite clear and I recommend them for future work. What was bringing problems was the time for chatting, which could be clashing with the time we were given chance to access computers. (Makerere)

We had only 3 hours a day to access computers in the gender department computer lab, which was not always enough to complete our assignments in time. Very often, there were power problems, and access to the net was not easy at the university. Internet problems were yet another challenge. Sometimes, there was lack of internet connections at the university, and the costs in private internet cafes are a bit high. (Bar-Ilan)

After I spoke to a few of my classmates, we all confessed to having similar problems with the KEWL site. It was difficult to navigate and at times very slow. The assignment directions were located in many different places; maybe it would be better if there was a single link that could provide the students with all the necessary information. This would definitely save time; I would say that I spent a good amount of time just trying to figure the site out. In addition to the lack of organization, the calendar on the main page was not helpful because it

never showed the modified due dates which, unfortunately added to the confusion. (UMD)

The technology in the course was fairly useful. I am extremely computer savvy, yet I struggled with the KEWL site. WebCT, which I had used in online courses previously was incredibly user friendly . . . I found the KEWL site to be confusing and many times I spent a long time looking for information on previous assignments, etc. (UMD)

Technically I had a difficult time with the KEWL server, because it was so slow. This was un-motivating for me, and it made the site a lot less navigable. In particular, during our group chats, I would become very frustrated because of the lag time – I would type something and then it would not be seen because it took minutes for it to be displayed. For example, one time, I repeated myself 4 times because nobody had noticed my response. The result was that I contributed less than I normally would have, only saying the essential things, because I didn't want to crowd the server, and because it seemed like my comments were not being received. It should be noted, though, that despite these technical issues, the group chats were very exciting because I was able to interact with my classmates live, so it felt more collaborative than simply posting a response to an assignment. The chats were an excellent tool, so instead of cutting them out, I would suggest improving the module if at all possible, or perhaps consider alternate methods of chatting, such as through MSN messenger or AIM. (UWC)

The chat room experience was good, although it was difficult to try and coordinate chat times because of time zone differences between all of the participants. I was a bit annoyed with the response time – I kept on getting logged off. As a result, I lost the data and information that I was trying to discuss with my colleagues. (Makerere)

Technology was great except for slowness of chat feature (UWC)

The chat room experience started out with some apprehension, as this was a new experience. Apart from a few mishaps and becoming familiar with the process, it was a good experience . . . It was comfortable to have a peer educator to support us in the lab. (Bar-Ilan)

As facilitators, what troubled us most was that these technology issues proved exacerbating to the already complicated epistemological challenges that students routinely encounter in learning to communicate and collaborate effectively online with peers across diverse geographic and cultural contexts (Yvonne Y. H. Fung, 2004; Lars-Erik Jonsson, Sylvi Vigmo, Louise Peterson, & Annika Bergviken-Rensfeldt, 2001). Nonetheless, and despite the fact that teacher/scholars continue to report a range of troubling issues in confronting the ubiquitous digital divide that manifests itself in student experience both in terms of physical access *and* in commensurability of technology experience –and even though it appears at first to be counter-intuitively paradoxical – data analysis from the WHWB course unmistakably indicates that many students self-reported their growth in online learning skills to be one of the most satisfying aspects of the course. Analysis of their texts also yields the equally unambiguous finding that empathetic and ongoing facilitation offered by instructors was an indispensable component in their ability to experience their struggles as measurably transformative, and as a marker of their growth as learners. Along with noting the constraints of the technology resources, therefore, participants simultaneously expressed appreciation for the ways in which technologies enabled their participation in a transnational exchange of this type. Their reflections insightfully challenge the variety of institutional limitations that short-changed their ability to fully experience the virtual capacity of the course, and explicitly point to

important theoretical as well as pragmatic factors that would be usefully considered in planning future course iterations.

The wiki is great but how will disadvantaged women make use of it?
(UWC)

We couldn't have done the course at all without the technology, so although it was flawed at times I'm mostly glad we had the opportunity.
(UMD)

Working with colleagues was one of the most exciting aspects of the course . . . creating friendly relationships was inevitable. I was so overjoyed when I saw some of them in the videoconference. I only wish they were close enough, I would shake each one's hand, or even give them a big **HUG!** From all this, I learnt that technology can actually unite people far away from each other, and create friendly relations that are academically, socially, and otherwise inspiring and developmental. More so, the fulfillment of tasks if done on time and if responsibilities are shared among individuals, gets more knowledge of the concepts. The contacts we made to/with each other through email, and chatting, and the consultations with my colleagues in Uganda, helped me to complete my assignments. (Makerere)

The team spirit being built through working together in the chat made me feel we can run projects through networking on improving on the health of women. (UWC)

Reflections: Course Design

What fascinates me and what is different from any other class I've taken is that much of the information that helped broaden my knowledge came from my fellow students, whereas it traditionally comes from the professor. Our professors for this class, however, were truly facilitators in the way they guided us while allowing the lessons to materialize from the group processes.

— Student, *Women's Health and Well-Being* (2007)

In their learning analyses, student comments reflect considerable homogeneity in perceiving the module's feminist and social-constructivist design to have provided them a uniquely efficacious approach for exploring the topic of women's health and well-being. Narratives selectively re/represented below indicate that in the intensity of their sustained dialogic interactions, participants perceived that their knowledge-making processes were materially facilitated by the collaborative and constructivist design of their virtual transactions. Participants reflected thoughtfully on these relational aspects of their learning transactions, and on the value of a scaffolding framework that enabled them to build upon and to deepen newly acquired understandings articulated by themselves and their peers as they progressed collaboratively "by doing" through the course. Their stories, excerpted below, assert that these elements of their e-course experience facilitated their abilities to nourish virtual collaborations, even in challenging circumstances. Participant narratives underscore the value of their shared role in knowledge-making processes to the co-construction of transdisciplinary knowledges that were transgressively global in scope.

I thought it was great to begin with the main topic, which is women's health and well-being, but then go deeper into health and well-being areas that we find more interesting such as the reproductive health, bodily integrity, etc. It was also pleasant to read about all of those topics at the end of the course and be able to extend my knowledge of women's health in other locations as well.

It was not a textbook version of women's health and well-being, but, focused more on the practicality and reality of how women actually feel. The interviews, for instance, provided an awareness of women's health and well-being that, perhaps a regular classroom setting of learning cannot provide.

I really enjoyed doing the interview since it was the first interview that I did in my life using tape recording and doing it formally.

Chatting with the facilitator and our peers in the brain storming sessions tapped into the knowledge of each participant and we gained insight into the ideas of others that we would not have gained, had we not been in contact . . . It was interesting to read everybody's work, and the openness and transparency contributed to relationship building. The views of our peers about their topic provided conversation and discussion. The different points of view also made provision for critical thinking and opinions.

The course provided us with the ability to analyze data we collected through the interviews.

I learned so much through reading and reviewing the other groups' information and their work.

All of the assignments related well to the course and helped to explain or complement course material. Breaking our class into different sections was also incredibly useful because it made our groups smaller and more condensed, allowing for greater specialization of the content we covered.

The depth of the material we covered was something I did not realize could be achieved via an online module. All of the assignments, as opposed to simply being the exercises that are assigned in many other classes, had purpose and were very meaningful.

The methodology of the course was perhaps the most unique aspect of it, from the teaching style to the online module to the opportunity to interact with people all around the world! Most of the assignments were

very meaningful, as I mentioned above, although our group was a little confused about some parts of the final wiki project. Also, some more optional readings might have been nice, although we gained many resources from our final projects.

The methodology of the course was really innovative and novel in that it emphasized gender theory and feminist ideologies that address issues of women's well-being through an interactive online atmosphere. One of the most unique aspects of this course was that we were given the opportunity to gain an international perspective from our group members. This integration of viewpoints allowed a comprehensive analysis of the topic in relation to the challenges that women face in other countries. This level of integration would not have been possible in any other course format. The increased interaction that resulted promoted responsiveness amongst my group members because comments and feedback were immediately available through the e-learning website.

The fact that we had to develop our own definitions of what women's health and well-being meant to us was very significant . . . I also like the fact that most of the assignments required that we read the other group mates responses because we got a chance to see how other people reflected or thought about certain issues. It was also important we reflected on our group mate's responses because it was a form of collaboration; it was good to get responses from our own group members of our own work just to see that our responses were actually read.

By promoting this form of learning, the instructors were encouraging students to be taught by peers, rather than a single professor. I feel this type of learning is more applicable to the field of Women's Studies as it promoted a "real life" view that cannot be established in a textbook. Rather than reading about other cultures and discussing their plights as given to us in literature, students got to experience through the posts, interviews, and discussions of others exactly what issues are predominate in their minds. This transnational view cannot be obtained solely in a classroom. The interactions with other universities were essential in this learning process.

Not surprisingly, students struggled with some aspects of the course design, particularly those connected with the discursive construction of and performance of virtual technologies, as discussed above. In surprising numbers, their comments about course design point to the gender imbalance among course participants as something they felt should be addressed in future iterations of the course. And while many students noted their appreciation of working closely in small groups, a few students expressed reservations about their experiences in groups, noting the challenges of sustained virtual collaboration, particularly with respect to time constraints.

More men need to be involved in such projects, especially from those universities that did not have them. Men are the perpetrators of inequalities and they are the ones who own the resources hence need to be involved. If they change their oppressive attitudes towards women and girls then they can be in position to change other men when they talk to them.

Furthermore, I would suggest that these other universities which are having a course . . . should involve male students because they could have also help to get rich information since gender means both men and women.

I must also note that not only was the beauty in this exchange of ideas between women, we also had males enrolled which to me gave a much needed flavor to the course. To me, the time when men across this world recognize that a woman issue is synonymous to a man's issue, peace and equality for all will arise.

I did not enjoy as much to work in the final group assignment because it was very difficult to get hold of my other classmates even though I was using e-mail.

I am of the view that the programme went way too fast and am not sure if it was good or bad. Personally, I wish it went a bit slower so that one can have time to internalize content gradually until it sinks perfectly in.

Managing the assignments of this course, together with the university academic activities was another challenge. It was at times difficult to find an alternative to forego, since both according to me were equally important.

Time management was another requirement of the course that was challenging. One incident in particular challenged me to put group interest above a personal challenge. It had to do with an unfortunate situation when we were doing assignment four. Something happened back home in Cameroon which gave me sleepless nights, and I could not coordinate my thinking. If I were doing any other course I would have asked for a holiday, but because the flow of the exercise depended on everyone's participation, I struggled against all odds and posted my assignment before going back to bed. The results were not good, but I learnt the lesson of collaboration.

There was some disagreement between me and my group mates with what a qualitative interview is and should be.

Once we broke off into groups I feel as if the cohesiveness of our class as a whole quickly deteriorated. When working with my reproductive health group, I feel as if I had completely lost sight of my other class members and their research. I feel as if there should have been attempt to bridge the work of the individual groups at a much earlier date. The amount of information learned in regards to a woman's health and well being may have been more extensive if we would have learned with the other groups.

I would have appreciated a case-study to be added to the course reading material – a case-study of a community or country working towards setting standards for women's health & well-being. It would aid the

process of bringing academia closer to the real struggles of women and their communities for a more equal and fair world. It could also be used to test the usefulness of the UN's Millennium Development Goals and assess how far the realisation of these goals would go to ensure well-being for women around the globe.

Reflections: Assessment

To our surprise, many students chose to comment on the methods of course assessment. Without exception, these comments were positive in nature, and demonstrated their perceptions of the importance of having assessment that was transparently and authentically integrated into the learning praxis. As excerpted re/representations indicate, despite well-documented frustrations with technology and with the heavy collaborative workload of the course, assessment was one of several elements that contributed to high levels of overall satisfaction for students. Particularly rewarding for students was the opportunity to be continuously involved in a peer feedback loop. Students enjoyed providing and receiving peer feedback throughout the course, and being rewarded for doing so; they also emphasized the facilitative assistance they received from the course instructors as useful. As a group, informants indicated that facilitators were highly instrumental in prompting them to become productively engaged in the learning community.¹²

The markings were both encouraging and challenging, and especially fair.

I think the way the assignments were thought through made it very easy to learn and to try to be open minded about other points of view regarding the same topics. I liked that we were able to assess and be assessed by our own class members.

The nature of the feedback throughout the course was encouraging and positive. On no account were we judged or put down. We were timeously motivated to complete each section of the work and a vital link was formed as each participant's work shaped the end product.

The grading rubrics . . . served as a guideline and an indicator of the expectations for the course. They also allowed us to do self evaluation, after completion of a section of work, as we could monitor the work ourselves and we could set our own standards. The grading rubrics were clear and covered all aspects of the work.

Through the thoughtful assessment and feedback in this course, I was able to continually modify the development of my research by incorporating different perspectives and analysis.

I really enjoyed that some of the assignments were to give comments regarding our virtual classmates work and that I was also given comments from them. This motivated me and made the work very interesting . . . furthermore the learning was more enjoyable and I think I got a lot out of the course without even realizing that I was learning so much.

I really enjoyed my classmate's feedback on the assignments where we were required to comment on each other's work. I was really interested in what they had to say.

Reflections: Collaborative Process

As I coded data from students' learning analyses, I noted that a sizable body of commentary reflected insightfully on their strongly affective transactions as virtual collaborators. While these comments clearly pertain to the overall constructivist design

of the course, and thus might have been included with other comments relevant to course design excerpted above, their comments about the unique experience of transnational knowledge-building through virtual collaboration, demanded, it seemed to me, to be underscored separately. Students took the opportunity to stress the pleasure they derived, as well as the satisfaction they experienced in their close collaboration with virtual peers. As they note below, the cultural border crossings they experienced as they collaborated together were among the most striking elements of their learning processes. Embedded within their comments, as well, is their acknowledgement of the effort these collaborations demanded and their understandings that the benefits derived demanded many types of labor on the part of virtual classmates and learning partners. Students came to appreciate (as did course instructors as we collaborated with one another, and in our interactions with students) that collaboration flourishes in correspondence to one's willingness to be continually reflexive, to listen and to speak for and with understanding, and to work across differences of many kinds as equals.

However . . . I only worked closely with one other student on our part for the final project. I really enjoyed working with her and I think that overall, it was probably the most collaboratively written paper I have ever done! However I would have enjoyed additional feedback or a chance to work more closely with my other classmates as well. It would have been really great to work with someone from more than one other country, and I think I would have learned even more from the experience.

When I saw it how it was going I realized it was more challenging than I thought it would be. I appreciated that we had to review and analyze the responses of our other classmates. Admittedly I was not completely

interested in their responses because I was focused solely on my contribution. However, when I put forth the effort and reviewed their work it was very useful. I was informed about the different experiences of other people who were older and/or younger than me. I was able to inform myself about the experiences of women who were from different cultures and societies.

Although working together was hard because of different time zones and different cultural aspects, it was great to see how each person interpreted women's health and well-being. I felt the technology could have been a little bit better. It was so slow!

When we worked in partners (mine was a male colleague), it was easier to get to know that individual and I enjoyed that aspect. I received a lot of positive feedback from my partner in the final project and am happy we worked well together.

I learned to work with others as a team and above all I learned to appreciate people's ideas, contribution and criticism. I may say this is the best way of learning. Through it I have learned to be analytical on issues and above all to appreciate criticism from others.

This particular collaboration project was truly a unique experience and overall, I am happy that I had the chance to participate. Before the actual collaboration began, our facilitator Kim Staking asked each student to write a reflection on collaboration. We were to write about our past experiences with group projects and we also had to identify our personal weaknesses and strengths. I admitted that I had a problem with control. The desire to possess some kind of control has accompanied me throughout much of my life. At first, I exerted control upon my body; managing it, disciplining it, smoothing out all of the imperfections, everything single inch of my body was subject to improvement. Looking back at those dark years I realize that I put so much attention to the structure and form of my body that I failed recognize the consequences of my actions. I no longer struggle with an eating disorder but the desire for control is still alive and its focus is now on others. This is something I struggled with during the final

project. My primary mistake was in conceiving the final project as a “finished product.” I only realized this after I read an email Kim Staking sent me a few days ago. She said, “In most classes, they don’t actually expect collaboration – they just pretend. They really want a very professional finished product, which means someone has to compensate for someone else. We want process to count in learning and evaluation as much as content.” I wanted the content to be easily understandable yet, also meet a high standard of academic work. I wanted the group space to be aesthetically appealing and also project a sense of academic authority. When I read the drafts, I compared them to a rigid standard and I felt compelled to re-write their work (fortunately I did not have a chance to re-do everything). My obsession with perfection and presentation prevented me from acknowledging the agency in others. How many voices did I silence in the act of revision? How many experiences did I erase in my blind obsession? This dangerous kind of thinking reenacts old exclusions based on difference—exclusions that we as feminists struggle to deconstruct both inside and outside our community of practice.

A good balance existed between individual work and group work. I had anticipated that cultural differences would be more of an issue and technical problems would be less of an issue, but it ended up being the other way around for me. Communicating with fellow group members was relatively easy and cultural or language barriers did not come up – rather the cultural differences enriched the interactions.

In their learning analyses, participants universally expressed a high degree of engagement in the course, citing the significance of the virtual dialogues, and the depth of new understandings they gained as they negotiated with virtual peers in each of the shared knowledge-building sequences that constituted the course. However, as evidenced above, participants also frankly acknowledged the often laborious costs exacted in maintaining the level of collaborative engagement required by the course design. In acknowledging their effortful labor, participant narratives illuminate a multitude of ways in which the virtual and transnational elements of this e-learning

situation greatly multiplied the extent and impact of socio-cultural-political difference among participants, and thus materially shaped challenges faced in the sense-making negotiations in which participants were engaged. Their virtual and transnational transactions multiplied not only the pleasurable intensity of their learning experiences but also the relational inequalities with which such transactions are inevitably transcribed. Their stories illustrate participants' awareness that timely, empathetic, and supportive facilitation on the part of instructors was a critical element in assisting them to collaborate efficaciously and with care for the other in knowledge-making processes situated within a virtual learning community that required the straddling of transnational barriers of difference both psychic and physical (Susan Wegmann & Joyce McAuley, 2010).¹³

Reflections: Learning Competencies

As a part of their final essay, participants were asked to revisit the course learning objectives to reflect on which experiences of the course they perceived to have contributed most significantly to their knowledge-building. In their responses, which were as diverse as the participants themselves, each referenced the value of dialogic virtual engagement with transnational classmates to their ability to construct and to articulate new knowledges. Most of their narratives reflected significant new understandings acquired in at least one of the following three competency areas:

- Understanding dimensions of difference in women's experiences of health and well-being
- Understanding of gendered differences in women's experiences of health and well-being across transnational contexts
- Attention to interrogating power relations in analyzing women's health and well-being.

As selectively chronicled in narratives re/represented below, participant reflections demonstrate that through their interrogation of women's experiences of health and well-being as members of this transnational and feminist e-learning community, they acquired paradigm-changing insights. In many cases, learners' narratives also reflect the sense that their transactions assisted them to acquire a greater awareness of themselves as global as well as local citizens. Emerging from narrative re/representations, which are deeply personal in their articulation, are students' acute awareness of the degree to which their learning had been comprehensively sharpened.

Understanding dimensions of difference in women's experiences of health and well-being

The health concerns addressed by the younger women, and those of us who fall in the age group above fifty were also different, confirming the theory that age is one of the concerns to address when treating issues of feminism.

It is interesting to see how viewpoints on health and well-being have evolved since this first assignment. In looking back on my own initial understanding of the concepts of health and well-being, I still believe that health and well-being are inextricably linked and multi-faceted, but my depth of knowledge about the factors that compromise or enhance them has greatly increased.

As a male student doing this module on Women's Health and Well-being was very interesting for me. I believe that women all over the world need to be empowered. There are still issues around Women's health that needed to be addressed. All men in their communities must support women and treat them as equal members. Women are valuable and needs to be treated as such.

Gendered differences in women's experiences of health and well-being across transnational contexts

This e-learning course, provided us with the opportunity to interact with one another . . . The emphasis was on the learning of new skills, exchange of ideas and through interviews with different groups of women, including different geographical locations, religion, race, and class, the multiple difficulties that women experience was highlighted. The readings raised critical issues with regards to the health and well-being of women, such as the inequalities of women and their difficulties to access resources to improve the quality of their lives.

Having learnt what bodily integrity is I realized that the majority of women at one time in their lives violate their own bodily integrity, through ignorance. For example when some women refuse to go to hospital or wait until the sickness reaches the worst stage then she is putting her life in danger. Some women go in for prostitution due to economical constraints; others go in for pornographic advertisements. All these activities abuse the bodily integrity of women and girls . . . The knowledge acquired from this subject of women's health and well being has given me a challenge to do what it takes to help women understand or change their perceptions of health and well-being and above all to understand that the destiny of their lives is in their hands and they need to say no to some of what is culturally constructed as normal.

It is very interesting to find out that many of the problems that affect women's body integrity are deeply embedded in culture in which people live. Very many students in their findings showed that practices like female genital mutilation, early and forced marriages, tattooing, husbands treating their wives as property, not allowing women to have access to and control over resources and not allowing them to participate in decision making were mainly the causes that make women not have good health and wellbeing.

I made the connection that cultural practices and beliefs highly influence women's reproductive, mental, social-well being and bodily health. It is now evident to me that cultural practices have a major

impact on women's health and wellbeing, of which I previously did not know.

The course brought us to reflect on women's health and well-being from a trans-cultural perspective. Simply put we were brought to see that the woman's second-rate citizen position can be quite problematic to her physical, social, and mental wellbeing. Her geographical location, her level of education, her ethnicity, race and culture, and her willingness to take up responsibility for her health, all have impacts on the quality of life she lives, which in turn affects her health.

A concept that I gained a much clearer understanding of during the course was that of bodily integrity. In my previous examination of this concept, it seemed abstract, and I didn't quite comprehend how the theory translated into actions that would enhance the health and well-being of women (and thereby men). I also enjoyed being a part of the mental health group as this is a topic that I am passionate about. Gender and mental health has always fascinated me but I was hesitant to delineate any sort of difference between men's and women's experiences. This assignment opened my eyes to a world of research I did not know existed – a perfect marriage of women's studies theory and psychology. I found that it has been proven that gender role stress, gender-based power differentials, and other socio-cultural and socioeconomic structures all play a major role in the higher incidence of certain mental health disorders in women and men.

Attention to interrogating power relations in analyzing women's health and well-being

In an age where we unconsciously define ourselves on the basis of national manmade borders, close to 40 students came together as global citizens to a much needed perspective on the state of a woman's well being. The scope of this course has showed me that there are many dimensions that contribute to the injustices of a woman's well being and health. The fact that we as a class had to separate into 4 separate groups to get a good grasp of the issues, tells me that much more research needs to be vested in this area. Also the fact that there are unique issues per geographical locations speaks to fact that women are suffering across the world. I don't believe that a woman's inaccessibility to reproductive health care weighs differently than the depression that a woman may suffer due to multiple jobs that she must

maintain in order to support her family. There is no hierarchy of oppression. As seen in the interview data across all groups, there is disproportionate amount of suffering of women compared to men.

The transcultural perspective during the course gave me a very valuable insight into the daily issues affecting women worldwide whether in the developed or the developing world. Every woman deals with similar issues if not the same . . .

The groups' responses we had to read was an excellent resource because it gave a sense of what problems women faced in different geographical locations other than the United States. I got a sense that no matter where we are or where we're from women's health and well-being are affected by many different aspects and some are the same!

After reading the article of Nussbaum on the "Capabilities Approach" I now have a different view on things. Access does not necessarily guarantee capability, a person can have all the facilities to better his or her life but that doesn't mean that he or she will use it. The themes that were highlighted are factors that affect women all over the world. For generations, women have been sacrificing themselves, their health and bodily integrity for the sake of families and the greater society. The idea should not just be equal opportunity or access but the freedom from making that sacrifice for families and societies.

Even with group members in many different countries we found that women shared very similar experiences, which is something I was very surprised to find. Women have different health care needs and many women are responsible about seeking the attention needed when they have the resources to do so. However, in every country that participated in the course we found that there are many barriers to making this happen.

Reflections: On Designing and Implementing *Women's Health and Well-Being, Transnational Perspectives*

My colleagues and I initially envisioned our collaboration as an opportunity to discover “whether it is possible to successfully provide access and support to implement a web-based course on women and gender across borders given the geographical, cultural, economic, social, and interdisciplinary differences that students would encounter” (Yusuf-Khalil, *et al.*, 2007, p. 54). As we worked fiercely together in 2006 to hammer out the details of the full-length course, the five of us recognized, both from the intensely pleasurable and productive nature of our own collaborations, and from analysis of data collected from the pilot module in 2005, that participatory engagement across virtual and transnational borders had exceeded our expectations. In subsequently analyzing data from the 2007 course, I have once more discovered that benefits to participants in this regard were again more than anticipated. As my colleague, Vivienne Bozalek has written (Bozalek, 2011), “What we could not have anticipated was the extent to which the module that we designed would provide all students multiple affordances to develop new skills, talents, abilities, and knowledge. Nor could we have predicted the striking degree of authenticity which would characterize their virtual exchanges with one another, or their ability to both dialogue and contest new understandings of women’s health and well-being with each other.”¹⁴

Analysis of informant data from the 2007 research venue of the *Women's Health and Well-Being* e-course strongly illuminates the fact that teachers and students alike engaged in this challenging virtual collaboration with the anticipation that it would offer rewarding learning interactions, and a unique opportunity to interrogate

the dimensions of women's health and well-being from a variety of transnational and transcultural perspectives. Selectively re/produced excerpts of participant texts have demonstrated the impressive degree to which students and teachers alike benefitted beyond our expectations in acquiring deepened and transnationally informed perspectives on factors enhancing and/or compromising women's experiences of health and well-being.

In sharing stories from this transnational feminist e-learning course, this dissertation contributes a rich tapestry of experiential learning to the "growing literature on collaboration among academics in higher education across borders, and the role of new media technologies in facilitating team teaching and social-constructivist learning as a means of exploring issues of women and gender" (Yusuf-Khalil, *et al.*, 2007, p. 64). Qualitative analysis of student narratives enables me to assert that technology-mediated, socio-constructivist e-learning environments have enormous potential to benefit all learners, particularly in assisting participants to collaboratively excavate and challenge knowledge hegemonies across multiple types of borders. However, I also caution that such collaborations require a serious investment of time and labor from all participants, both in the design and implementation phases of praxis. Among the unforeseen obstacles with which we struggled were our own challenges in collaborating equitably, and with group consensus, across socio-cultural factors of difference. Uneven response on the part of institutions to support technology usage also proved challenging.

Our many-voiced stories have given resonant expression to the reality that these pre-existing situational elements were, at times, complicating factors in our collaborations. Clearly evident, as well, however, are the ways in which the sharing of these challenging labors enhanced our opportunities for both teaching and learning. Many of us experienced a sharpening in our virtual transactions beyond those we have experienced in face-to-face knowledge-making collaborations. As previously reported in the literature, in consequence of the intensely social dimensions of virtual transactions with others as equally knowledgeable peers, this experience is particularly prevalent in constructivist e-learning environments— even across real and perceived inequities of difference (Joseph Kamugisha, 2007; Paul Kawachi, 2013, Elizabeth Tisdell, 1998).

Manifest through crystallized re/representations of participant voices in this dissertation is the manner in which this sharpening aspect of our virtual collaborations also worked explicitly in cultivating an increased awareness among learners that differential access to resources dramatically affects women's health. As we collaboratively explored women's health and well-being, many of us gained a clearer perspective of women's health needs transnationally, and a better understanding of the complexities of global resource allocation with respect to women's health. Virtual collaborations prompted participants to explore dimensions of women's health and well-being from a range of interdisciplinary and transcultural perspectives, deepening their engagement with feminist frameworks interrogating and theorizing dimensions of difference (race, class, gender, nationality etc.). This in turn prompted them to

reflexively interrogate the diverse socio-cultural, geographic, historical and political contexts that impacted their experiences and understandings of women's health in their *real* worlds.

Importantly, participant stories also bear witness to the fact that many of us have become more keenly aware of the ways in which pre-existing conditional elements inevitably create situational inequalities – not only with respect to women's health and well-being – but with respect to any transnational academic collaboration. We have experienced concrete examples of the ways in which social, political, economic, and other factors have material as well as virtual consequences for academics and their students. In constructing the storied quilt of participant experience from the women's health and well-being course, I have become deeply cognizant of the fact that we cannot and should not ignore such these consequences as we work to transnationalize learning contexts for our students, nor should we dismiss the possibility of their being minimalized in any classroom teaching situation as institutional practices are discursively articulated for the continued and accelerated deployment of digital technologies.

Ultimately, in sharing stories emerging from the *Women's Health and Well-Being* course, I assert that constructivist engagement in transnational academic collaborations offer feminist pedagogues substantive possibilities for internationalizing their teaching within the expansively interdisciplinary but as yet too infrequently globalized space of Women's Studies. It is my hope that feminist (and other) pedagogues, engaging stories of this transgressive knowledge-making praxis, will have

developed a stronger sense by which to assess the risks and benefits to their participation in academic collaborations of this nature.

Endnotes

¹ Culminating projects, along with other relevant course materials, are archived on the author's dissertation wiki; see appendices.

² While workload is often heaviest at the end of the semester in many university courses, it was exacerbated in this instance by external constraints such as juggling the differing semester calendars at the participating institutions. However, I encountered similar challenges in re-conceptualizing the *Women, Art and Culture* course as a learning community in which knowledge-making processes were shared and collaborative. I was constantly adjusting the syllabus in an attempt to distribute the workload more evenly while still allowing students time to build the necessary relationships and capabilities to produce successful group collaborations. In their final reflections, student participants in both courses frankly acknowledged the dilemma this aspect of the course experience posed for them, but neither I nor my colleagues nor student informants have yet to identify an approach that we feel would as effectively facilitate the building of classroom learning partnerships sufficiently robust to support the co-production of digital knowledge-building projects; the processes of developing, nurturing, and sustaining these collaborations are time-consuming.

³ The seven learning outcomes we identified are: (1) Identification of factors that contribute to or constitute women's physical, social, and mental health and well-being in specific localities and across localities; (2) Identification of factors that enhance and/or compromise women's health and well-being in and across localities; (3) Collaborative engagement with other students and lecturers/facilitators to develop an awareness of gendered differences in the ways in which health and well-being is constructed and constituted across historical, cultural, generational, racialized, sexualized, classed, political and geographical contexts; (4) Collaborative engagement in constructing knowledge, and attention to interrogating power relations, in analyzing how women's health and well-being is experienced in and across contexts; (5) Development of empirical data about women's health and well-being through conducting a qualitative interview with a local informant; (6) Collaborative writing of a research project investigating one specific area relating to women's health and well-being at a transcultural level of analysis; and (7) Presentation of group research project to other members of the class.

⁴ Interviews and associated data are archived on the KEWL site; transcriptions are in possession of the author.

⁵ And, as has been previously noted, in consideration of both the socio-constructivist design and the transnational orientation of our virtual classroom, the first third of the course was devoted to dialogic discovery and associated relationship-building activities.

⁶ We linked from the KEWL site at UWC to my wiki at University of Maryland because I was the only member of the teaching team with wiki experience. It was apparent to us in looking at the process of posting digital projects to the KEWL course site that the UMD wiki would be more negotiable for all participants, faculty and students alike.

⁷ The pace of exchanges over email among facilitators and IT staff at the four centers as we attempted to organize the video-conference was absolutely frenetic. It was also particularly challenging as I and my colleagues lacked expertise with the technical infrastructure requirements, and so were hampered in our abilities to preview and trouble shoot potential problems in advance.

⁸ It is my sense, even in the contemporary moment, that while one can vary the type and extent of the technology-enabled learning environment widely, participants would still experience inequities with respect to issues of access and support that would prove similarly constraining to their knowledge-making capabilities. This would be particularly the case with respect to any type of collaborative learning praxis. Institutions of higher learning generally remain very much “behind the curve” with investment in the types of support needed to consistently offer effective support to newly adopted digital learning environments.

⁹ The inability of existing learning platforms (available to us cross-institutionally), to adequately handle the communication demands of the socio-constructivist course design was an eye-opener to me and to my colleagues. If this course were to be funded again, I would envision an entirely different user access option, possibly a wiki. At the time, none of us were experienced enough in web-based teaching to be aware of other possibilities beyond the proffered access to a university supported online course management system. A highly effective use of funding in future iterations of the course would be the provision of adequate pre-training for faculty in the technology selected to host the course, and in the provision of continuous IT support for faculty and students throughout the duration of the course.

¹⁰ We had experienced similar problems with the chat feature in the WebCT course management platform used during the 2005 pilot module. Hoping to find a more

satisfactory solution in the latest iteration of the course (2010), I utilized Google chat, which proved similarly problematic. Even in my most recent online teaching experience at the University of Maryland (January 2013 – using CANVAS/ELMS), and despite assurances that this tool was state-of-the-art, user-friendly, and flexible, our small group virtual conferencing experiences were impeded by technology issues of response time, remaining connected, etc. Finding an improved means by which to conduct small group synchronous chat would be a high priority in any future iteration of the course. If a video connection is not needed, Skype and similar virtual conferencing tools are reportedly able to accommodate more than two users synchronously. Unfortunately, even using Skype, when conferencing internationally, I have frequently experienced dropped calls.

¹¹ Although we thought we had resolved many of these issues, student difficulties participating in synchronous chat actually mirrored our own earlier experiences. As designers we had ourselves tried unsuccessfully to hold occasional synchronous chats as we collaborated together on the syllabus, and we too had experienced the frustration of slow response times, university firewall interference, etc. Fortunately, both for ourselves, and for the students, synchronous chat technology did allow facilitators to capture and post a textual transcript of chats for all members to review.

¹² In keeping with our emphasis on learning as both relational and process-oriented, course assessment markings were of a low stakes nature at the beginning of the course. The heaviest allocation of points was spread among the final assignments; however, even this portion of the course was marked from a formative rather than a summative perspective. That is, we were looking primarily at the collaborative process – at the resources the students had brought together, and how they responded to the assignment prompts in constructing their projects – rather than measuring the finished product against an externally identified standard of measurement. In the first phase of the course, each facilitator marked the cohort of students from her own institution; once students were placed in their project work groups, each facilitator marked those students who were in her group. Final grades were made by adding all of these marks together, as well as those accumulated through any additional tasks required by the home instructor.

¹³ In our planning and implementation of the course, we were particularly interested in discovering from participants whether or not they perceived our efforts to provide technology access and support across transnational borders to be efficacious, given the geographical, cultural, economic, social and interdisciplinary differences that critically

shaped the learning environments in which they operated. Challenges notwithstanding, the response was universally affirmative.

¹⁴ Our original funding having expired, our e-learning course is currently approved only at the University of the Western Cape. In the summer of 2010, Vivienne Bozalek and myself facilitated the most recent iteration of *Women's Health and Well-Being*, offering it to a small group of distance learning students enrolled at UWC. Analysis of the data from this latest iteration of the course is ongoing, but preliminary results indicate once again that participants found it to be an exceptionally engaging (and complexly demanding) learning opportunity. Notwithstanding the strength of data supporting similar conclusions across all three course iterations, and the permanent location of the course on University of the Western Cape's free and open-source e-learning platform (therefore greatly reducing the costs of operating such a course relative both to traditional face-to-face courses and to other transnational online courses in the post secondary setting), funding participation from other institutions remains problematic. Given our own highly positive experiences of engagement, together with findings that also support high levels of student learning engagement, and notwithstanding the laborious work of co-facilitating, each of the five of us who initially collaborated to design the course would gladly undertake to participate in the course again should funding become available.

Conclusion

My premise, discovered in the classroom itself, is that the students I teach have already been schooled too much. Students themselves are not unaware of this fact . . . What I hadn't realized was that the manner in which we conduct our lives is even more important than the things we do with them . . . A pedagogy [envisioned] as the creation of a safe space. Human beings, no matter what their background, need to feel that they are safe in order to open themselves for transformation.

— Jane Tompkins (1996: 160, 199, 213)

But there are no safe spaces. Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without. To bridge is to attempt community. For *nepantleras* [individuals electing to leave the place of “no longer” to cross to the space of “not yet”], to bridge is an act of will, an act of love, an attempt toward compassion and reconciliation and a promise to be present with the pain of others without losing themselves in it . . . You'll have to leave parts of yourself behind. The bridge is both a barrier and a point of transformation. By crossing, you invite a turning point, and initiate a change.

— Gloria E. Anzaldúa (2002: 3, 557)

Additionally, in order to understand our place in the world we must also examine our social relationships and practices in which we are engaged. Collaboration requires that we come together to work in difference, for it is difference that gives feminism flexibility and strength. Unlike the popular work produced in commodity culture, this sort of work – work that attempts to “bridge” different worlds and identities is difficult, complex, messy and never finished.

— Student, *Women's Health and Well-Being* (2007)

Though they differ about the extent to which the space of transformation can/should be a “safe” point of departure, all of the women cited above share the premise that collaborative engagement with others across difference is an essential, if challenging, aspect of choosing to engage in actions that may lead to social justice outcomes. As a women's studies scholar, I envision the classroom as a community space pregnant with transformative possibilities. Evidence from student research

informants suggests that building community with/in the classroom, as participants work collaboratively to construct bridges connecting them to one another across and through difference, is a vital component of facilitating transformative learning with the hope of social justice outcomes.

Due in large part to its interdisciplinary commitment, the field of Women's Studies has greatly assisted my inquiry into what might constitute transformative classroom praxis. Social justice scholarship produced by academics and activists in many diverse communities of practice has converged in this dissertation, including transgressively critical work by educators, feminist art historians, narrative ethnographers, visual culture theorists, women's studies scholars, and others.

As I was somewhat disconsolately reflecting on a sense of dissatisfaction with my teaching in 2003, my observations led me to believe that despite positive evaluations from students, my pedagogical approach wasn't prompting them to meaningful learning engagement with course themes or with one another across their many types of difference. I decided to work inductively in re-envisioning the classroom as a space of transgressive possibility. Assuming that classroom participation inevitably produces some degree of change in how members enact their identities as learners, I re-conceptualized the classroom as a community in which students would be prompted to build relationships of care and trust as they engaged in collaborative knowledge-making transactions. Recognizing also that learning is a series of situated processes not necessarily transparent to others, and intuiting that their input would contribute significantly to my inquiry, as well as to broader conversations about

teaching and learning in higher education, I invited students to contribute empirical data about their experiences in the two courses with student-centered pedagogies that served as research venues.

Susan L. Star's queries about the ownership of knowledge practices animated my research inquiry into student's classroom learning. In querying students about their engagement in learning processes, I anticipated that a qualitative analysis of informant data would enable me to describe processes by which women's studies students participated in knowledge-making. My hope was to discover that a transactional praxis, scaffolded through dialogic discussion within a feminist pedagogics of community, and making use of socio-constructivist processes of shared knowledge-making in a technology-rich learning environment, would prove to be of value in prompting participants to transformative learning across difference. The findings of this dissertation demonstrate this to have been the case.

As I have written this dissertation, I have continued to teach women's studies courses online, to participate in conferences, to author articles and to write a book chapter about dialogue, digital technologies, and transformative teaching and learning in higher education. I have noted that conversations contesting and theorizing classroom teaching and learning practices have become much more ubiquitous in nearly every academic space than they were when I began this research (Narend Bajjnath, 2013; Megan Boler, 2006; Ping Gao & Gerald M. Mager, 2013; Jan Herrington, Ron Oliver, & Thomas C. Reeves, 2006; Paul Kawachi, 2013; Ronald J. J. Voorn & Piet A.M. Kommers, 2013). Acute concerns about learning in higher

education are voiced by administrators, faculty, and students alike, all of whom find their relationship with knowledge production to be problematic in some degree. In many spaces, discussants evidence a sort of stultifying performance anxiety about their abilities to negotiate the increasingly complex range of factors – institutional, financial, and technological – that they perceive to be affecting their participation in meaningful knowledge production in traditionally organized classrooms.

Stakeholders differ vigorously in their proposals about and in their responses to materially changing conditions on the ground in higher education. They disagree as well in formulating responses to discursively shifting cultures shaping classroom teaching, and to increasingly dissimilar sets of expectations for classroom learners. There is sharp anxiety with what many stakeholders see as a looming irreconcilability between the goal of providing critical knowledge-making experiences to an ever-growing and demographically changing body of technology-savvy twenty-first century students on the one hand, and, on the other, institutional policies and practices that have perceptibly decreased support of faculty in their teaching work, increased administrative duties, and emphasized a standards-based approach to measuring learning outcomes. Nonetheless, all parties agree that changes in how teaching and learning are performed or measured without a clearly articulated and shared understanding among stakeholders – about roles and responsibilities in the ownership of knowledge production – and an accompanying investment in re-conceptualizing twenty-first century classroom learning spaces will exact high costs to faculty and students alike.

While many of these issues are outside the parameters of this research, this dissertation does produce significant and relevant understandings about *process* in classroom knowledge-making. It argues that a more broadly shared understanding of learning as transactionally situated and co-constructed in collaboration with other participating human and non-human actants will permit stakeholders to more effectively address and/or to work within contemporary institutional and structural constraints, and to support the growth of twenty-first century learners in shared experiences of productive knowledge-making. Although this project does not directly engage issues troubling many stakeholders about the migration into higher education of weakly correlative measures of product-based performance outcomes, it does provide critical alternative narratives and trajectories for consideration.

Through eschewing quantitative measures of teacher and student performance in favor of a deeper qualitative engagement with data from classroom learners, this dissertation produces a nuanced description of the often laborious but highly rewarding praxis by which teachers were able to facilitate a collaborative knowledge-making praxis that both students and teachers alike experienced as genuinely transformative. We experienced this praxis as transformative in the manner in which it enabled us to challenge assumptions, and to co-construct transgressively alternative narratives in response to our collective engagement with knowledge hegemonies. Furthermore, through its re/representation of participant texts, the dissertation renders visible this cycle of perception and processing, thus addressing, indeed construing,

many elements relevant to classroom knowledge production (broadly conceived beyond its traditional borders) that are preoccupying educators and students alike.

The stories from research informants, interpretively stitched together, collectively assert the value to learners of re-conceptualizing classrooms (in a variety of configurations: face-to-face, blended, or virtual) as dialogic, constructivist, collaborative, peer-centered, and technology-rich – because these elements have enabled fruitfully transgressive processes of shared ownership in knowledge-making. In and of itself, this constitutes social justice praxis; it also opens the possibility that transformative processes of classroom knowledge-making may engender social justice outcomes beyond the classroom. While the project of interleaving participant voice into this document has inevitably resulted in only a partial inclusion of individual experience, it is, nonetheless, through privileging texts from student informants that I have been able to demonstrate how these transactional knowledge-making processes enable, indeed, materially constitute, the transformative possibilities of the learning environment. In this, its central narrative, the dissertation makes a substantive contribution to ongoing conversations about classroom learning. Moreover, it adds student voices, too often excluded, to these conversations.

Summary of Findings

The two research venues were dissimilar in many respects. These included not only content focus within the field of women's studies, but also classroom setting (blended/ face-to-face versus virtual), levels of student matriculation and geographic scope of student participants, and the inclusion of transnational teaching partners in the

women's health and well-being course. Nonetheless, situational analysis of data has demonstrated strikingly similar findings across both venues with respect to constructivist elements of learning that are dialogic, collaborative, peer-centered, and rich in shared social presence through the socio-constructivist deployment of digital technologies (Paul Kawachi, 2013). Crystallized re/representations of informant texts in the two research venues paint a dynamically fluid portrait of students and other human and non-human elements working collaboratively and dialogically in technology-rich environments in the processes of co-constructing knowledge. Across research venues, student informants emphasized the significance of transactions that were materially rich in shared experience to their sharpened participation in classroom learning. Collaborative and constructivist practices and processes, including dialogue, story, and the use of technologies facilitated participants' exploration of unexamined assumptions, and their abilities to engage with constructs of difference. Catalytic learning configurations enabled by and through these transactions prompted participants to iteratively and critically engage with one another in transformative knowledge-making processes. Interpretive re/representations of participant texts in a descriptively narrative framework have produced illustrative glimpses of students in both venues as they learned to question dominant cultural narratives and to co-produce alternative stories critiquing the powers of unexamined knowledge hegemonies.

Transactional Processes of Knowledge-Making

These findings offer important considerations to classroom designers across disciplinary boundaries who are seeking to prompt classroom learners towards critical

processes of knowledge-making. Practices identified above by informants as most fruitful in promoting critical learner engagement were those that scaffolded their development of shared ownership in knowledge-making processes through course designs that provided for supportive teacher facilitation and feedback rather than a method of direct instruction. My co-teachers and I attempted to democratize the learning community by acting as more knowledgeable peers rather than as experts and authority figures. A final element recognized as significant by informants in this cycle of learning praxis was the elevation of processes prompting self-reflection and feedback through formative methods of assessment, and an emphasis on peer learning partnerships. Each of these elements prompted the development of capabilities in students that facilitated their active participation in constructing relational bridges of understanding across difference as they worked in close collaborations with one another.

Dialogue

The initial prompting to listen for understanding as participants unpacked assumptions around contested issues of difference promoted the development of a shared repository of experience for students to draw on. Notable in student dialogues, whether virtual or face-to-face, was the sense of pleasure with which participants engaged in these peer-to-peer transactions, even (or especially) when conversations demonstrated the divergence in opinions held by discussants. Analysis of their transactions also demonstrates the adeptness with which participants in dialogue with one another were able to challenge assumptions tacitly held by themselves and their

peers. Skillfully, and with evident enthusiasm, students deployed understandings co-constructed through dialogue in subsequent peer transactions as they collectively assumed a greater share of ownership in classroom knowledge-making processes.

Story

Across classroom formats, learners' increased reflexivity, generated in part through their collective and iterative participation in story, significantly facilitated their participation in constructing newly transgressive understandings of themselves and their peers as knowledgeable partners. These benefits from earlier dialogic encounters assisted students as they engaged feminist literatures, and visual culture producing alternative narratives about contested themes in the *Women, Art, and Culture* course, or in the case of the *Women's Health and Well-Being* course, as they engaged the stories told by interview informants. Re/representations of student data reflect the importance of shared story-making processes to participants' negotiation of these alternative narratives and their discursive challenge to dominant knowledge frameworks. In critical deployment with peers, these transgressive new knowledges of self and other were enabling elements in prompting students to successfully elaborate collaborative pathways in the co-construction of digital story projects that critiqued hierarchies of difference sustaining power regimes in knowledge hegemonies. Even as transactional collaboration in story-making was increasingly effortful for participants as they invested themselves in the production of their own critically informed stories, analysis of informant data is unambiguous about the rewards to students of their participation in these processes.

Social Engagement through Digital Technologies

Analysis of participant collaborations clearly reveals the signal value of constructivist configurations of digital and social media technologies in facilitating transformative learning processes. Technology transactions were the most commented on element of classroom learning processes; informants reported their material experiences of, with, and through technologies (along a broad spectrum of human and non-human transactions) as the most discursively salient and affectively compelling aspect of their course engagement. Technologies facilitated a range of relational learning configurations that enabled uniquely productive sense-making collaborations as participants engaged contested issues under interrogation.

Informants identified technology-configured peer transactions as prompting an ‘unsettling’ of previously held assumptions, and a new awareness of the difference of lived experiences. As a result, participants emphatically construed their learning as having been materially enhanced by the collaborative and constructivist nature of their shared digital transactions. Cumulatively, this cycle of knowledge-making praxis produced in students an academic de-centering, and the development of a differential learning consciousness that perceptibly enhanced their abilities to perceive and process alternative cultural narratives as they interrogated knowledge hegemonies, and collaborated to produce stories demonstrating new understandings.

Critiques

In asserting the significance of each of these processes noted above, participants also offered insightful comments about improving elements of course

design to more fully support their knowledge-making transactions. Although feedback at times was plaintive with frustration with respect to inevitable technology-connected glitches and misfires, even students who struggled with severe access and/or related resource constraints overwhelmingly credited their engagement with digital technologies as having been enormously fruitful in their knowledge-making endeavors. Other particularly nettlesome challenges cited by students concerned the adjustments they were required to make for the very differently calibrated workload distribution associated with the increased emphasis on learning as process-oriented. They found this to be very distinctive from their more traditional course experiences, particularly in the sustained degree of engagement in classroom transactions across the time period. In this regard, they indicated the importance of having adequate technology infrastructure, and of having facilitative tech and instructor support to their abilities to remain productively engaged as they negotiated a framework of shared ownership in knowledge-making.

While student informants, myself, and my teaching colleagues were united in our candid acknowledgement of the often laborious and effortful costs demanded of all participants in these collaborative classroom knowledge-making endeavors, the data across both venues is equally insistent in reflecting a widely shared assessment that transactions requiring a serious and sustained commitment to collaborative knowledge-making were not only more personally satisfying, but were also more fruitful in prompting the articulation of transformative and transgressive new understandings than a praxis that did not require this engagement. In making visible

these learning processes at work in the two research venues, this dissertation affirms that constructivist practices and technologies (deployed beyond the traditional boundaries of the classroom) were instrumental to students' abilities to experience ownership in the processes of constructing alternative new knowledges relative to women's cultural production or to women's health and well-being. Teachers and students overwhelmingly reported this praxis to have prompted complexly relational and highly rewarding learning processes that facilitated their shared collaboration in knowledge-making across bridges of difference.

Implications

Analysis of informant data corroborated my own observations that high levels of student satisfaction with their classroom transactions contributed to increased levels of learner engagement, which in turn facilitated participant abilities to negotiate a transgressive praxis of shared ownership in knowledge-making. In specific, narratives authored by students as they experienced knowledge-making in technology-enabled classroom environments emphasize that participants perceived their collaborative knowledge-making transactions to have exceeded their expectations in every way. Moreover, qualitative analysis of data constructed by students in the completion of course assignments further excavates and illuminates the consequential materiality of their collaborative learning transactions to their abilities to articulate new understandings with respect to course themes. Situational analysis of empirical data clarifies that as participants were prompted to engage one another as knowledgeable peers, their abilities to engage with feminist frameworks interrogating and theorizing

dimensions of difference were also perceptibly enhanced. In articulating critiques of knowledge hegemonies with their peers, and in authoring alternative knowledge stories, participants gained a greater appreciation for the manner in which dominant knowledge frameworks discursively produce and obscure socio-cultural inequities.

Indeed, as participant narratives excerpted in this dissertation persuasively attest, student informants, myself, and my academic colleagues all experienced the dialogic nature of our knowledge-making transactions as having allowed us to explore women's cultural production and women's health and well-being from a uniquely and transgressively expansive range of interdisciplinary and transcultural perspectives. As students collaboratively shared in knowledge-making processes, using digital media to articulate their own cultural narratives, they were also prompted to reflexively interrogate the diverse socio-cultural, geographic, historical, and political contexts of their own lived experiences with, and understandings of visual culture or women's health and well-being beyond the classroom. Having experienced shared knowledge-making in this dialogically collaborative, constructivist and technology-infused environment, neither myself, my colleagues in the women's health and well-being course, nor student informants would select a more traditional classroom learning design over the transgressive possibilities of the transformative praxis practiced in the research venues that contributed to this dissertation study.

The strength of these findings illustrates the critical importance of focusing attention on the nature of the material processes by and through which classroom learners are engaged. The dissertation as a whole asserts that prompting shared and

collaborative processes of ownership in knowledge-making in higher education classrooms enables learners to capitalize on vital resources of peer diversity that, when mobilized, have the capacity to support potentially transgressive and tangibly transformative outcomes for individuals and for the community as a whole. However, these dissertation findings are not only a significant intervention into discursive conversations about knowledge production in higher education; they are also a timely critique of the deployment of simplistic means of measuring classroom learning by focusing on standard or product-based outcomes alone. Rather, asserting the utility of some material transactions above others in classroom knowledge-making permits educators to shift the register of conversations about institutional investments from one that constructs learning as product-oriented to one that critically examines the utilities of processes, practices, and technologies specific to classroom-sited learning. Findings in this dissertation make obvious the fact that institutional decisions about teaching and learning in higher education have costs beyond those assessed to individual learners. Indeed, participants' communities of affiliation (in and outside of the academy), and society at large are implicated (and impoverished as well) when knowledge-making in higher education is formally prompted without provision for dialogic reflection upon the praxis in which learners are engaged.

Future Directions

Educators in K-12 sectors as well as those working in post-secondary settings are highly cognizant of the fact that social media and digital technologies have already altered teaching and learning practices, and are in the process of permanently changing

the landscape of classroom learning environments. Yet to be sorted out, however, is anything resembling approaches recommending themselves to those working for social justice learning outcomes. Many critical educators, including myself, are theorizing knowledges that will contribute to this over-arching project (Anthony W. Bates and Gary Poole, 2003; Cathy S. Bouras, 2009; Jacqueline Cossentino, 2004; David Pratt, 2004; Yusuf-Khalil, *et al.*, 2007). Given that new technologies are constantly in the offering – in classroom settings that are increasingly wired, wireless, and/or virtual – educators may find themselves overwhelmed with choices. In examining university students’ learning transactions as collaborative partners in technology-rich classrooms, the qualitative depth of this dissertation study offers educators potentially transgressive and transformative design choices; I hope that it will be a valuable resource to faculty exploring their options for a student-centered praxis deploying social media and digital technologies.

A range of forums will facilitate my ability to contribute to conversations about teaching and learning in higher education. Educational blogs, online newsletters, centers for teaching excellence, and scholarly conferences are only a few of the many locations where learning theory discourse is increasingly concentrated on classroom use of new media technologies. I hope that future extensions of this work will encourage educators to deploy technology-enhanced practices in classroom-specific, peer-centered, knowledge-making collaborations. Such practices can benefit teachers and learners alike. I am particularly heartened by recent discussions in online teaching and learning journals from a small but growing number of scholars who are focusing

their work on the wide range and spectrum of students' responses to these educational appropriations of new media technologies (Sharon L. Collingwood, Alvina E. Quintana, Caroline J. Smith, *et al.*, 2012; Ping Gao & Gerald M. Mager, 2013; Ronald J.J. Voorn & Piet A.M. Kommers, 2013). Along with other feminist educators, I am committed to theorizing and charting innovative classroom practices that may elicit robust student engagement through technology-rich transactional knowledge-making processes – while simultaneously prompting learners to critically interrogate the narratives of knowledge projects, theirs and others, as always already politically and discursively situated within the material space of larger social worlds.

Appendices

- I. Institutional Review Board – Applications for Research Involving Human Subjects
- II. Instructions for accessing Course Wiki (including sample syllabi)
- III. Situational Analysis: Mapping the Research Venues Maps

Appendix I: Institutional Review Board – Applications for Research Involving Human Subjects

- A. University of Maryland. Institutional Review Board (IRB). Application Approval Notification. IRB Application Number: 06-0423; Project Title: *Assessing the Use of Critical Pedagogies in Women's Studies 250: Women Art and Culture*. Approved September 1, 2006.
- B. University of Maryland. Institutional Review Board (IRB). Addendum Approval Notification. IRB Application Number: 06-0423; Project Title: *Assessing the Use of Critical Pedagogies in Women's Studies 250: Women Art and Culture*. Approved October 6, 2006.
- C. University of Maryland. Institutional Review Board. Initial Application for Research Involving Human Subjects. *Assessing the Use of Critical Pedagogies in Women's Studies 250: Women Art and Culture*.
- D. Multi-University Data Collection Consent Form: *Women's Health and Well-Being*

University of Maryland Institutional Review Board (IRB) – Application Approval Notification



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
MEMORANDUM

Application Approval Notification

2100 Blair Lee Building
College Park, Maryland 20742-5121
301.405.4212 TEL 301.314.1475 FAX
irb@deans.umd.edu
www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB
September 7, 2006

To: Professor Katie King
Ms. Kimberlee Staking
Department of Women's Studies

From: Roslyn Edson, M.S., CIP *RSE*
IRB Manager
University of Maryland, College Park

Re: **IRB Application Number:** 06-0423
Project Title: "Assessing the Use of Critical Pedagogies in Women's
Studies 250: Women, Art, and Culture"

Approval Date: September 1, 2006

Expiration Date: September 1, 2007

Type of Application: New Project

Type of Research: Nonexempt

**Type of Review
For Application:** Expedited

The University of Maryland, College Park Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved your IRB application. The research was approved in accordance with 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, and the University's IRB policies and procedures. Please reference the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

Recruitment/Consent: For research requiring written informed consent, the IRB-approved and stamped informed consent document is enclosed. The IRB approval expiration date has been stamped on the informed consent document. Please keep copies of the consent forms used for this research for three years after the completion of the research.

Continuing Review: If you intend to continue to collect data from human subjects or to analyze private, identifiable data collected from human subjects, after the expiration date for this approval (indicated above), you must submit a renewal application to the IRB Office at least 30 days before the approval expiration date.

Modifications: Any changes to the approved protocol must be approved by the IRB before the change is implemented, except when a change is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. If you would like to modify the approved protocol, please submit an addendum request to the IRB Office. The instructions for submitting a request are posted on the IRB web site at: http://www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB/irb_Addendum%20Protocol.htm. *(continued)*

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks: You must promptly report any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others to the IRB Manager at 301-405-0678 or redson@umresearch.umd.edu.

Student Researchers: Unless otherwise requested, this IRB approval document was sent to the Principal Investigator (PI). The PI should pass on the approval document or a copy to the student researchers. This IRB approval document may be a requirement for student researchers applying for graduation. The IRB may not be able to provide copies of the approval documents if several years have passed since the date of the original approval.

Additional Information: Please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 if you have any IRB-related questions or concerns.

University of Maryland Institutional Review Board (IRB) – Addendum Approval Notification



UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

2100 Blair Lee Building
College Park, Maryland 20742-5121
301.405.4212 TEL 301.314.1475 FAX
irb@deans.umd.edu
www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB

October 16, 2006

MEMORANDUM

Addendum Approval Notification

To: Professor Katie King
Ms. Kimberlee Staking
Department of Women's Studies

From: Roslyn Edson, M.S., CIP, 
IRB Manager
University of Maryland, College Park

Re: **IRB Application Number:** 06-0423
Project Title: "Assessing the Use of Critical Pedagogies in Women's
Studies 250: Women, Art, and Culture"

**Approval Date Of
Addendum:** October 6, 2006

**Expiration Date of
IRB Project Approval:** September 1, 2007

Application Type: Addendum/Modification; *Approval of request, submitted to the IRB Office on 26 September 2006, to add an additional data source consisting of written assignments generated by students enrolled in the Women's Studies 250 course in which the named student is the instructor and to use a revised consent form which reflects this change.*

**Type of Review of
Addendum:** Expedited

Type of Research: Non-exempt

The University of Maryland, College Park Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office approved your IRB application. The research was approved in accordance with the University's IRB policies and procedures and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. Please reference the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

Recruitment/Consent: For research requiring written informed consent, the IRB-approved and stamped informed consent document is enclosed. The IRB approval expiration date has been stamped on the informed consent document. Please keep copies of the consent forms used for this research for three years after the completion of the research.

Continuing Review: If you want to continue to collect data from human subjects or to analyze private, identifiable data collected from human subjects, after the expiration date for this approval (indicated above), you must submit a renewal application to the IRB Office at least 30 days before the approval expiration date.

(Continued)

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks: You must promptly report any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others to the IRB Manager at 301-405-0678 or redson@umresearch.umd.edu.

Student Researchers: Unless otherwise requested, this IRB approval document was sent to the Principal Investigator (PI). The PI should pass on the approval document or a copy to the student researchers. This IRB approval document may be a requirement for student researchers applying for graduation. The IRB may not be able to provide copies of the approval documents if several years have passed since the date of the original approval.

Additional Information: Please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 if you have any IRB-related questions or concerns.

CONSENT FORM

Project Title	Assessing the Use of Critical Pedagogies in Women's Studies 250
Why is this research being done?	<i>This research project is being conducted by Kimberlee Staking and Dr. Katie King at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are at least 18 years of age and you were enrolled in Women's Studies 250 in fall 2006. The purpose of this research project is to examine the skills and dispositions gained in this course and to inquire into how students enrolled in the course understand and evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching practices utilized in the course.</i>
What will I be asked to do?	<p><i>The procedure involves participating in a focus group discussion along with several other students who were enrolled with you in WMST 250. The focus group will take place at the conclusion of the fall 2006 semester. The entire study will be conducted at the University of Maryland, during the 2006-2007 calendar year. You will be asked to devote a total of 90 minutes to a focus group session on your own time. This focus group will take place after the end of the fall semester. The focus group will consist of an open discussion based on a series of questions about what you have learned in this course and how you think you have learned it. Sample questions include "What stands out most in your mind about WMST 250?"; "What was your favorite assignment, activity or class discussion?"; and "Did you feel like your voice or your opinions were heard in our class discussions? When did you feel like you were being heard? When did you not?"</i></p> <p><i>The focus group discussion will be recorded with a digital sound recorder and conducted in a classroom location on campus to be determined. You may also be contacted at a later date and asked to participate in a 30 minutes follow up interview but you will be under no obligation to do so.</i></p>
What about confidentiality?	<p><i>We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, (1) your name or any other identifiable information will not be included in the write up of the focus group sessions; and (2) only the researcher will have access to this information. The focus groups data write-up will not contain information that may personally identify you. Once the digital recording has been transcribed by the research team, it will be destroyed. (August 2008, planned)</i></p> <p><i>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p>

<p>What are the benefits of this research?</p>	<p><i>This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigators learn more about the effectiveness of critical pedagogies in teaching visual culture and visual literacy to undergraduate students. We hope that other people might benefit from this study through an improved understanding of how students understand and evaluate the impact of contemporary visual culture on society. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through gaining an improved understanding of the impact of critical pedagogies on students' attitudes about contemporary social issues, such as how visual culture mediates, constructs, or enforces social inequities and social norms. It is further hoped that this study can contribute to understanding how a transformed pedagogy of critical inquiry may equip undergraduate students to become more aware, reflexive and participatory citizens.</i></p>
<p>Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?</p>	<p><i>Participation is not a course requirement and your course grade will not be affected by whether or not you choose to participate. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i></p>
<p>What if I have questions?</p>	<p><i>This research is being conducted by Kimberlee Staking and Dr. Katie King in the Department of Women's Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Katie King at katking@umd.edu, 301-405-6877, 2101 Woods Hall, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742.</i></p> <p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678</i></p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>

<p>Statement of Age of Subject and Consent [Please note: Parental consent always needed for minors.]</p>	<p><i>Your signature indicates that: you are at least 18 years of age; the research has been explained to you; your questions have been fully answered; and that you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</i></p>	
<p>Signature and Date [Please add name, signature, and date lines to the final page of your consent form]</p>	<p>NAME OF SUBJECT</p>	
	<p>SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT</p>	
	<p>DATE</p>	



University of Maryland Institutional Review Board (IRB) – Initial Application for Research Involving Human Subject

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK
Institutional Review Board
Initial Application for Research Involving Human Subjects

Please complete this cover page AND provide all information requested in the attached instructions.

Name of Principal Investigator (PI) or Project Faculty Advisor Professor Katie King Tel. No. 301-405-6877
(NOT a student or fellow; must be UMD employee)

Name of Co-Investigator (Co-PI) _____ Tel. No. _____

Department or Unit Administering the Project Department of Women's Studies

E-Mail Address of PI katking@umd.edu E-Mail Address of Co-PI _____

Where should the IRB send the approval letter? Kimberlee Staking, 2101 Woods Hall, Department of Women's Studies

Name of Student Investigator Kimberlee Staking Tel. No. 301-589-2280

E-Mail Address of Student Investigator kimart@umd.edu @ _____

Check here if this is a student master's thesis or a dissertation research project X

Project Duration (mo/yr – mo/yr) 01/07 -- 08/08

Project Title Assessing the use of Critical Pedagogies in Women's Studies 250: Women, Art and Culture

Sponsored Project Data	Funding Agency <u>N/A</u>	ORAA Proposal ID <u>N/A</u>
------------------------	---------------------------	-----------------------------

(PLEASE NOTE: Failure to include data above may result in delay of processing sponsored research award at ORAA.)

Vulnerable Populations: The proposed research will involve the following (Check all that apply): pregnant women , human fetuses , neonates , minors/children , prisoners , students X, individuals with mental disabilities , individuals with physical disabilities

Exempt or Nonexempt (Optional): You may recommend your research for exemption or nonexemption by completing the appropriate box below. For exempt recommendation, list the numbers for the exempt category(s) that apply. Refer to pages 5-6 of this document.
 Exempt---List Exemption Category Numbers _____ *Or* Non-Exempt

If exempt, briefly describe the reason(s) for exemption. Your notation is a suggestion to the IRB Manager and IRB Co-Chairs.

Date	Signature of Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor <i>(PLEASE NOTE: Person signing above accepts responsibility for the research even when data collection is performed by other investigators)</i>
Date	Signature of Co-Principal Investigator
Date	Signature of Student Investigator
Date	REQUIRED Departmental Signature Name _____, Title _____ <i>(Please also print name of person signing above)</i> <i>(PLEASE NOTE: The Departmental signature block should not be signed by the investigator or the student investigator's advisor.)</i>

Institutional Review Board Application

Title of Project: Assessing the use of Critical Pedagogies in Women's Studies 250: Women, Art and Culture

Principal Investigator: Katie King, PhD, Department of Women's Studies
Student Investigator: Kimberlee Staking, Department of Women's Studies

1. Abstract

The purpose of this research project is to inquire into the effectiveness that students enrolled in WMST 250 would assign to the use of critical pedagogy as incorporated into the curriculum that structured their course experience. The research, conducted with students enrolled in *WMST 250: Women, Art and Culture*, in the fall semester, 2006, will explore how the use of critical pedagogies in the teaching of an introductory undergraduate Women's Studies course may impact student understanding of oppression within society and their willingness to engage in social justice actions as a result of such understanding. The research will be accomplished by inviting students who have completed the course to participate in a focus group to discuss their experience in the course. It is hoped that, in the future, other people might benefit from this research project by gaining an improved understanding of the impact of critical pedagogies on students' attitudes about contemporary social issues such as how visual culture mediates, constructs, and enforces social norms. It is further hoped that this study can contribute to an understanding of how and if a transformed pedagogical approach to the teaching of visual culture equips undergraduate students to become more aware, reflexive, and participatory citizens.

2. Subject Selection

a. The subjects will be students who have participated in Women's Studies 250 with the student investigator as their instructor in fall 2006 at the University of Maryland. Participants for the focus group will be recruited via email from the roster of the fall 2006 WMST 250 course, and asked if they are willing to participate in the study. The email (which is attached to this application as Appendix A) will briefly describe the focus group procedures. Those selected to participate in the focus group will be given a consent form and guaranteed privacy and protection. They will have the opportunity to decline participation, and full disclosure of information will be provided.

b. There will be no specific characteristics (e.g., age, race, gender) that define participant selection. Focus group volunteers will be randomly selected from the course. The students should be 18 years of age or older to participate in the focus groups, to avoid parental consent when the parents may live quite far from College Park, MD.

c. see 2b

d. Up to 10 students will participate in this study.

3. Procedures

What precisely will be done to the subjects? Describe in detail your methods and procedures in terms of what will be done to the subjects?

Selected participants will be contacted via email to establish a time for the focus group to meet. The focus group will occur in a classroom in Woods Hall, where the Women's Studies Department is located. Before beginning the focus group, participants will be asked to read and sign a consent form outlining the procedures. The focus group will be recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Sample questions for the focus group are attached in Appendix B. Students will be asked to comment on the teaching, structure, content and curriculum of the course as well as their classroom interactions with the instructor and with other students. Certain information gathered in this focus group may appear in the student researcher's dissertation, however, confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent possible. No specific information will be disclosed in the write up of the sessions. At the conclusion of the focus group, participants will be thanked (but not compensated) for participating in the research and will be informed that they may be contacted again for a subsequent interview after the focus group session has been transcribed but that they are not required to participate in any further interviews.

How many subjects will be recruited?

The focus group will involve up to 10 students.

What is the total investment of time of the subjects?

Students who agree to participate in the focus group must commit to a 60 minute session, with a potential follow up interview, lasting no more than 30 minutes.

Focus group question sets

Sample focus group questions are attached. See Appendix B.

4. Risks and Benefits

Risks: There are no known risks in this study. Participants will be told that their participation is voluntary and that they can decline to answer specific questions or to end their participation at any time without penalty.

Benefits: This research will not benefit the participants personally, but results may help the investigator have a better understanding of how visual culture influences society, and the effect it may have directly on participants' view, beliefs and values. Results may also include a better understanding of how pedagogical approaches impact student learning in the humanities classroom with respect to social justice. Outcomes of the project may include providing suggestions for improving undergraduate humanities education in ways that encourage greater social and civic engagement on the part of students.

5. Confidentiality/Anonymity

Several standard measures to protect the confidentiality of participants will be maintained. While there will be identifying information on the recordings – the participants' names and voices – standard methods to protect privacy will be utilized with the recordings. The identities of participants will remain confidential. Because of the potential for students to discuss personal information (e.g. political opinions about social issues and their participation in the course) in the interviews, participants' identities (and any personally identifying information) will be kept confidential in all conference presentations or publications generated from this research project. Nonetheless, no information – in the form of opinions and values – will be solicited from the participants that would not normally be discussed in the WMST 250 classroom. Data will be securely stored on the student investigator's computers, several hard disks, and audiotapes as described below. **Only the Principal and Student Investigator will have access to all data, including the names of the participants.** Hard copies of data will remain in a locked location known only to the student investigator. Informed consent forms will be stored separately from any and all data. All data, except that described below will be destroyed (i.e. shredded or erased) when the initial project is complete, tentatively set at the end of summer 2008.

A numerical coding scheme will be established to identify individual subjects for internal purposes. Only the student and the principal investigator will have access to the coding scheme to the identity of individual subjects in the focus group or in follow up interviews. The coding scheme will be stored on the personal computer of the student investigator, which is protected by a password known only to the student investigator. A copy of the code sheet will also be kept in a locked file in a location known only to the student investigator who will personally transcribe the tape(s) using back up copies. Once transcription is complete, tentatively set at the end of summer 2008, each transcription will bear only the codes as participant identifiers and the back up tape will be erased.

At no time will the tape(s) be played in public. The original tape(s) will be stored for a total of 2 years for purposes of maintaining a data file for future publications should verification of transcripts against original tapes become necessary. These tapes will be stored in a locked location known only to the student investigator. After 2 years, the student investigator will personally will destroy the tapes.

Transcripts of interviews and all field and meeting notes will be kept for 10 years. Transcripts and notes will be kept on the personal computer of the student investigator, which is protected by a password that known only to the student investigator. One copy will be kept for reference in a locked file in a location known only to the student investigator. After 10 years all notes will be destroyed.

6. Information and Consent Form

State specifically what information will be provided to the subjects about the investigation:

Appendix A: Email Asking for Focus Group Participants

Message Subject: Request from Kimberlee Staking

January xx, 2007

Dear Member of WMST 250, Fall 2006 –

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to ask for your participation in a research project I am conducting this year. In the coming spring semester, I would like to conduct a focus group discussion with students, such as you, who took WMST 250 during the fall 2006 semester. In this focus group, I hope to learn more about your experience in WMST 250 – how you liked you the course, what you found particularly challenging, what readings made the greatest impact on you and if you feel like the course has had any effect on your attitudes toward certain social and cultural issues.

If you choose to participate in this research, I will ask you to take part in a focus group facilitated by me. This focus group will last no longer than one hour, and will be conducted in a classroom in Woods Hall. The session will be digitally recorded, but your responses during the discussion will remain completely confidential. In other words, though I may use the information you provide in future conference presentations and publications, your name and identity will not be revealed at any point. During the focus group itself, we will discuss your experiences during the course. I am particularly interested in hearing about your perceptions of the course material and the way in which it was presented.

I would greatly appreciate your consideration of my request. Unfortunately, I cannot offer you any compensation for participating in this research. If you are willing to participate, please contact me via email by replying to this message. In your reply, please tell me the best way to contact you in the future (email, cell phone, room/home phone). *Agreeing to participate does not necessarily mean that you will be selected to participate in the focus group as selection will be completely randomized.* Accordingly, I will be randomly selecting a sample from the group of students who agree to participate; I may not need to involve each student. If you are selected, I will contact you to schedule the time of our focus group and see if you would be free to participate. Up to 10 students will participate in the focus group. After I have transcribed the tapes of our discussion, I may contact you for an additional follow up interview lasting no more than 30 minutes, but you will be under no obligation to participate in a follow up interview.

Thanks in advance for your help. I hope that you are having a successful semester, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Kimberlee Staking
Doctoral Student, Department of Women's Studies
University of Maryland

Sample Focus Group Protocol: Women's Studies 250

NOTE: As the focus groups will not occur until after the fall semester, 2006, at this point, I am not entirely certain that these sample questions will remain unchanged. These are the questions I am hoping to have discussed, however, it should be understood that this sample protocol may be subject to revision, based on the actual experience of the class that I will be teaching in the fall of 2006.

What stands out in your mind most about WMST 250?

What were your expectations heading into the course? To the best of your recollection, what motivated you to sign up for the course?

What, if anything, surprised you about the course?

What percent of the reading did you do?

What percent of the reading do you remember well?

What was your favorite reading?

What reading or readings do you remember as being difficult?

Did any particular reading frustrate you?

What was your favorite assignment, activity or class discussion?

What assignments, activities or discussions do you remember as being challenging?

Did any particular moment in the course frustrate you? Will you tell us about it?

Do you feel like the course materials represented a diversity of subject positions?

Do you feel like the readings that pertained to contemporary social issues challenged your ideas about topics such as racism, sexism or gender oppression?

Do you feel like any of the readings, class discussions, activities or assignments had an affect on your attitudes towards a certain issue? In other words, did any of the work we did in the class change your opinion on a contemporary social issue?

Did any of the readings, class discussions or class activities and assignments expose you to a perspective on a contemporary social issue with which you were previously unfamiliar?

Did you feel that there was a place for your identity and experience in the context of the class?

Did our class discussions aid in developing your understanding of *Women, Art and Culture*? If so, which ones and how did they do so?

Were you frustrated or angered by any of the opinions expressed in class regarding gender, sexuality, race, racism, privilege or oppression in American culture?

Did you feel like your voice was heard in our class discussions? When was it heard? When was it not?

Did you feel like the instructor made her politics visible and transparent in her presentation of the materials on contemporary social issues? If so, did you feel that she did so appropriately? What would you imagine her political stance to be on issues discussed in the class?

Did you feel comfortable with the political stance taken by the instructor? Why or why not?

Did you feel that you were expected or required to express points of view similar to that of the instructor? How did you form your opinion on this?

Did you feel like your opinions were respected in the course? Did you feel safe voicing these opinions? If not, please explain. Elaborate on a specific instance if you can.

What were the most important ideas you took away from WMST 250? Would you be inclined to take another course in which you would encounter the ideas discussed in WMST 250?

Appendix B: Sample Focus Group Protocol

NOTE: As the focus groups will occur in the future, I want to keep this question protocol open for interpretation, change, addition and subtraction. Further I have included a wealth of potential questions, as I want the group to be free to address both curriculum and pedagogical issues. It should also be understood that this sample protocol may be subject to revision based on the actual experience of the WMST 250 course that I will be teaching in the fall of 2006.

Hello and thanks for taking the time to join this focus group. Please feel free to express your opinions freely and openly in our discussion session:

What stands out in your mind most about WMST 250?

What were your expectations heading into the course? To the best of your recollection, what motivated you to sign up for the course?

What, if anything, surprised you about the course?

What percent of the reading did you do?

What was your favorite reading?

What reading or readings do you remember as being difficult?

Did any particular reading frustrate you?

What was your favorite assignment, activity or class discussion?

What assignments, activities or discussions do you remember as being challenging?

Did any particular moment in the course frustrate you? Will you tell us about it?

Do you feel like the readings that pertained to contemporary social issues challenged your ideas about topics such as racism, sexism or gender oppression? How?

Do you feel like any of the readings, class discussions, activities or assignments had an affect on your attitudes towards a certain issue? In other words, did any of the work we did in the class change your opinion on a contemporary social issue? Can you elaborate?

Did any of the readings, class discussions or class activities and assignments expose you to a perspective on a contemporary social issue with which you were previously unfamiliar?

Did you feel that there was a place for your identity and experience in the context of the class?

Did our class discussions aid in developing your understanding of *Women, Art and Culture*? If so, which ones and how did they do so?

Were you frustrated or angered by any of the opinions expressed in class regarding gender, sexuality, race, racism, privilege or oppression in American culture?

Did you feel like your voice was heard in our class discussions? When was it heard? When was it not?

Did you feel like the instructor made her politics visible and transparent in her presentation of the materials on contemporary social issues? If so, did you feel that she did so appropriately? What would you imagine her political stance to be on issues discussed in the class?

Did you feel comfortable with the political stance taken by the instructor? Why or why not?

Did you feel that you were expected or required to express points of view similar to that of the instructor? How did you form your opinion on this?

How would you define the role played by the instructor in the course? How would you define the role the instructor expected the students to play? How was your own view of yourself as a student or of the instructor challenged by these roles?

Did you feel like your opinions were respected in the course? Did you feel safe voicing these opinions? If not, please explain. Elaborate on a specific instance if you can.

What were the most important ideas you took away from WMST 250? How do you think you incorporated these ideas? Through what combination of class activities and assignments?

Would you be inclined to take another course in which you would encounter the ideas discussed in WMST 250? Why or why not?

How do you anticipate that you might act or think differently about our society as a result of taking WMST 250?

Thanks for your time, any questions?

Thanks much for all your time. Do you have any final comments about this session or the course in general? I appreciate the time and energy you took to add to the discussion, and hope that this experience broadened how you think about the course and its ability to help you in understanding the visual information you confront on a daily basis. Thanks again. After I've transcribed the tapes, I may contact you to see if you would be willing to participate in a brief follow up interview that would last no more than 30 minutes.

Multi-University Data Collection Consent Form



Women's Health and Well-Being:

Trans/Cultural Perspectives

Instructor Contact Information:

Dear Student,

This is a unique opportunity to engage in a collaborative learning experience with fellow students and colleagues from selected Women and Gender's Studies programs from across the globe. In its emphasis on collaborative, cross-cultural e-learning activities and exercises, it is a ground-breaking project for all participating institutions. As a teaching and learning team, we believe that both students and those involved with instruction and assessment will benefit from interaction with each other through the process of learning new skills, exchanging of ideas, and interrogating our own and each others professional and personal knowledges.

Much thought, time and energy has been devoted to the planning and implementation of this project. It has also involved many stakeholders and would not have been possible without the support of the International Women's and Gender's Studies Consortium, its Director Dr. Deborah Rosenfelt (Department of Women's Studies and Office of Curriculum Transformation), the Ford Foundation, the Office of Information Technology at the University of Maryland, particularly Mary Kot-Jansen, the e-learning support team at The University of the Western Cape and supporting academic and technical staff on site at each of the other locations.

The team of designers and instructors of the collaborative module are the following people:

Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo; Makerere University

Vivienne Bozalek; University of the Western Cape

Kimberlee Staking; University of Maryland

Rivka Tuval-Mashiach; Bar-Ilan University

Yasmeen Yusuf-Khalil; University of the West Indies

The abovementioned people have been and are still involved with this teaching and learning project and wish to share the experiences of the project with a wider audience. We regard it as important to share this information through fora such as conference presentations and by writing journal articles and book chapters on the work achieved in this project. This letter is to ask you whether you would be prepared to give us permission to use the e-learning material which has been and will be generated in the process of engaging with the project, including material (particularly student generated projects) which has been uploaded onto the web.

Please consider the following in your response:

1. You are requested to give permission individually, not as a group/class.
2. Whether or not you give this permission, is entirely your personal decision, and it is entirely voluntary.
3. There will be no rewards for giving this permission, as there will of course be no penalty for refusing it.
4. You have a right to withdraw your permission at a later stage – so long as it is prior to any publication – and we would then refrain from including your story in the research.
5. We would use your e-learning contributions for the purpose of research only and not for any other purpose.
6. Your name and any other names you refer to will not be used and you will therefore be anonymous.

Consent form

I, _____ give the people mentioned above who have been involved with the planning and implementation of this project permission to use the material on KEWL New Gen which I have generated for the module.

I understand that those involved in planning and implementing this joint module are intending to share the work generated in the module in the form of publications and conference presentations.

I also understand that:

- ✚ Whether or not to give this permission is a personal decision, and it is entirely voluntary.
- ✚ There will be no rewards for giving this permission, as there will of course be no penalty for refusing it.
- ✚ I have the right to withdraw my permission at a later stage – so long as it is prior to any publication – and the researcher/s then refrain from including my story in their research.
- ✚ The researchers would use my stories/drawings for the purpose of this study only and not for any other purpose.
- ✚ The identity of myself or any other person included in my story will be protected.

My signature below indicates my permission to use the material I have generated on the Women's Health and Well-Being e-learning course:

Signed at _____ (Place) **on** _____ (Date)

_____ (Name)

PLEASE NOTE:

If you have any further queries in addition to what has been explained in the attached letter or the consent form, please do not hesitate to contact the Course Instructors, whose e-mail details are given at the beginning of the attached letter.

Appendix II: Instructions for Accessing Dissertation Wiki

Additional information about the two research venues is archived online:
https://wiki.math.umd.edu/arhu_wmstks/Main_Page. Note that a login is required.
Contact author at kimart1234@gmail.com for login information.

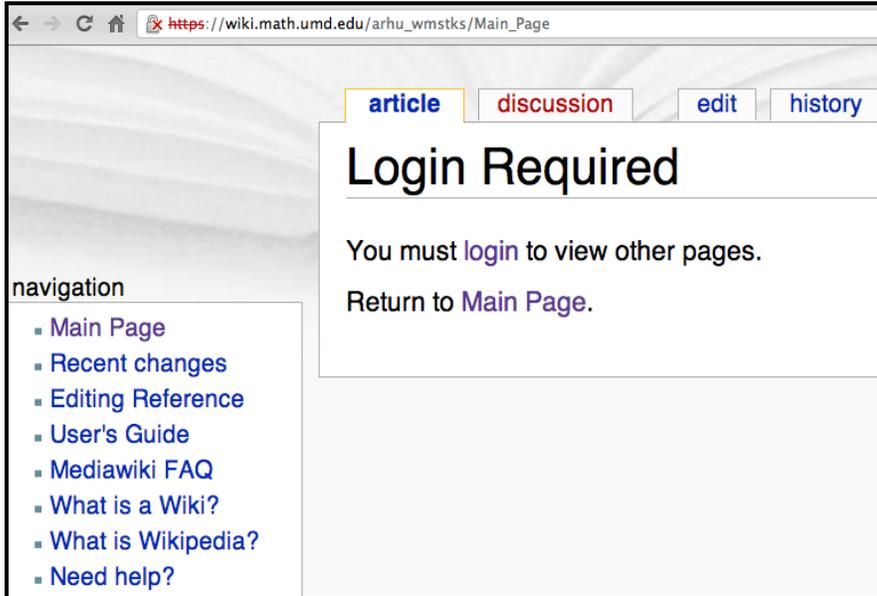


Figure 48: Wiki Arrival Page

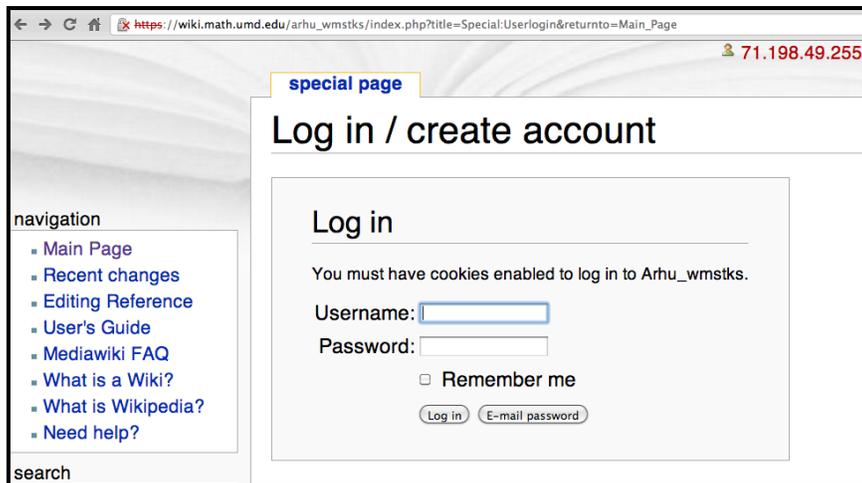


Figure 49: Wiki Login Screen

Enter username and password and click on “login”. After a moment you should be automatically sent to the welcome screen. On some browsers you may need to click on “Return to Main Page” whereupon the following welcome screen is shown.



Figure 50: Wiki Main Page

Select “Resource Links” to view course syllabi and other information with respect to the research venues. You will be able to navigate through the Wiki to see additional information.

Appendix III: Situational Analysis Maps

- A. Template for Constructing an ‘Ordered Situational Map’
- B. Ordered Situational Map: Women, Art, and Culture
- C. Ordered Situational Map: Women’s Health and Well-being: Transnational Perspectives
- E. Social Worlds / Arenas Maps

Template for Constructing an Ordered Situational Map

This template for constructing analytic maps for research purposes comes from Adele E. Clarke's text, *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn* (2005, see especially p. 86-117). Clarke suggests an initial mapping of the elements of the situation by using the following categories of analysis:

- Individual Human Elements/Actors
- Collective Human Elements/Actors
- Discursive Constructions of Individual and/or Collective Human Actors (as found in the situation)
- Political/Economic Elements
- Temporal Elements
- Major Issues/Debates
- Non-human Elements/Actants
- Discursive Construction of Non-human Actants (as found in the situation)
- Sociocultural/Symbolic Elements
- Organizational/Institutional Elements
- Spatial Elements
- Related Discourses
- Implicated /Silent Actors/Actants – as found in the situation
- Other kinds of elements found in the situation (TBD)

The Ordered Situational Maps I constructed for each of the research venues are reproduced on the following pages. These preliminary exercises enabled me to sort information as it emerged from empirical research data.

Ordered Situational Map: *Women, Art, and Culture* (WMST 250)

- **Individual Human Elements/Actors**
 - Individual students (80)
 - Feminist Artists studied in the course
 - Instructor / Researcher
- **Collective Human Elements/Actors**
 - Each cohort as a learning community
 - OIT support staff
 - Informal alliances among student informants based on categories of difference such class, ethnicity, gender, race, etc.
- **Discursive Constructions of Individual and/or Collective Human Actors** (*in situation*)
 - Student participation in Intergroup Dialogue seminars
 - Student work groups
 - Biases/Stereotypes/Assumptions held by individuals or groups as surfaced in classroom discussion
 - Peer to peer feedback and peer learning collaborations
 - Student funds of knowledge and lived experiences with visual culture
- **Major Issues/Debates**
 - Feminism and Women's Studies
 - Feminist knowledge frameworks
 - The body as represented in contemporary art and visual culture
 - Gender as constructed in the media
 - Categories of Difference, Privilege, Power, and Oppression
 - What counts as art? Women as cultural producers
- **Non-human elements/actants**
 - Digital Technologies
- **Discursive Construction of Nonhuman Actants** (*as found in the situation*)
 - In-class technology tools available in teaching theater
 - Online discussion forums
 - Reflective journaling in WebCT
 - Technology-enabled group presentations and projects
- **Organizational/Institutional Elements**
 - PhD student teaching stand-alone sections; capped enrollment of twenty-five students per section
 - Course fulfilled Core General Education requirements
- **Related Discourses**
 - Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
- **Other kinds of elements found in the situation**
 - Dual role as instructor and researcher; working under IRB protocols

Ordered Situational Map: *Women's Health and Well-Being* (WMST 498k)

Individual Human Elements/Actors

- Individual students (33)
- Five co-designers and four facilitators/instructors: Vivienne, Grace, Rivka, Yasmeen, and I
- IT support liaisons: Mary, UMD; Flavia, Makerere University; Nina, Bar-Ilan University; Derek, UWC

Collective Human Elements/Actors

- International Consortium for Graduate Studies in Women and Gender
- Technology support team at each of the four institutions
- Student Cohorts at each institution
- Cross-Institutional Student Work Groups
- UMD video-conference team
- **Discursive Constructions of Individual and/or Collective Human Actors** (in situation)
 - Different disciplinary and educational backgrounds cross-institutionally among facilitators and students
 - Short term collaboration at summer institute became a multi-year and mostly voluntary commitment for design team
 - Goals of students enrolled in the course – unusually varied
 - Mix of undergraduate (advanced level) and graduate students
 - Different levels of tech capabilities, access and support at each institution
 - Benefits and challenges of collaborative group work heightened in cross-institutional and virtual work groups across multiple time zones
 - Individual and collective biases/stereotypes/assumptions surfaced in cross-institutional dialogues and group collaborations
 - Different expectations about the appropriate degree of instructor support and facilitation in working with groups on culminating projects
 - Enthusiasm among students for cross-institutional interactions but also real time tensions over political, social, cultural differences
 - Student funds of knowledge and lived experiences of health and well-being

Political/Economic Elements

- Government and social unrest in some locations closed institutions
- Realities of north/south digital divide complicated virtual collaborations
- **Temporal Elements**
 - Heavy time commitments on the part of all participants – students, instructors, support staff
 - Time difference across geographic contexts
- **Major Issues/Debates**

- What constitutes women's health and well being? How (are) the two connected to one another? What are factors that compromise either or both? What are factors that enhance either or both?
- Oppression, power and privilege as constructed and experienced around the gendered, raced and sexed body
- The four research topics – how they are constructed and experienced across contexts – Bodily Integrity, Mental Health, Women's Reproductive Health and HIV/Aids, Social Well-Being
- North-South issues relative to politics, culture, social values, power, resources
- **Non-human elements/actants**
 - Technologies for Virtual Learning
 - Video-conference
- **Discursive Construction of Nonhuman Actants**
 - Technology-enabled projects and video-conference presentation
 - Features of course management platforms – WebCT / KEWL
- **Sociocultural/Symbolic Elements**
 - Differing social constructions of gender and other categories of difference across geographic contexts
- **Organizational/Institutional Elements**
 - Meeting distinctive departmental course requirements and timetables at each university
- **Spatial Elements**
 - Elements of materiality constructing the 'virtual' classroom – computer labs etc.
- **Related Discourses**
 - Nussbaum and Human Capabilities
 - Northrup and Individual Health Empowerment
 - Qualitative interviewing methodology
- **Other kinds of elements found in the situation**
 - Dual role as instructor and researcher
 - Feasibility of replicating course?

Social Worlds / Arenas Maps (Meso-Level Analytic Framework)

After constructing ordered situational maps for each of the research venues, Clarke suggests engaging the following questions to track discursive trajectories that will be useful in exploring and interpreting the ‘bigger picture’ issues emerging from data analysis. (p. 110, 115)

- 1) What are the salient social worlds operating here?
- 2) Which of the ‘big stories’ that emerge can I or do I wish to tell (coherently)?
- 3) What stories of embodiment are embedded in data from each of the situations?
- 4) What framework will help tell the stories in the data?

Women, Art, and Culture – Salient Social Worlds

- Students in U.S. system of higher education at a research one institution: primarily middle and upper middle class with economic privilege
- Very high achievers with high SAT scores; only a small number of ‘boost up’ programs targeting minority groups and/or disadvantaged high achievers
- Minority students have a significant sense of racial oppression
- Teaching theater very effective learning environment for the ‘plugged in’ undergraduate population
- Graduate teaching assistants are primarily those instructing intro courses and covering diversity electives in many departments
- Most courses use direct instruction and summative modes of assessment; my pedagogy is very different from ‘the norm’; students are not experienced in collaborative learning nor comfortable with it
- Most students come into the class holding normative assumptions about gender, race, feminism, women’s studies, contemporary visual culture, and other issues under contestation in the syllabus

Women’s Health and Well-Being – Salient Social Worlds

- Transnational, virtual, and cross-institutional collaborations highlight shared commonalities as well as many similarities, and differences
- Virtual classroom constructed in an online course management platform
- Shared experiences of and understandings about health and well-being as lived and constructed across contexts is the focus of collaborative peer engagement
- Social constructivist learning paired with qualitative research methodology
- Authenticity of learning tasks prioritized in designing course
- Inescapability of differential access to technology
- Experiences of health and well-being of participants themselves was a concrete as opposed to a theoretical issue
- Students work hard and with enthusiasm in the co-construction of knowledge despite structural and institutional barriers and technology challenges
- Negotiating across many divides of difference pose constant challenges despite high ‘good will’ factor

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