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# Teaching Feminist Research Methods: A Comment and an Evaluation

Shannon N. Davis and Angela Hattery, George Mason University

**Abstract:** What are feminist research methods and how are they different from other, non-feminist research methods? This paper begins by interrogating the question of how research methods become labeled as feminist. Building on this knowledge, we detail how this investigation guided our implementation of a new feminist research methods course sequence in a Women and Gender Studies program. This article is not an evaluation of our course; it is a feminist exercise in self-reflection on the feminist processes that, when invoked, results in feminist teaching of any course. But in this case, it is a course that is not always identified as being ripe for a feminist approach: methods. We conclude by drawing upon our experience to discuss some of the structural and pedagogical challenges when teaching feminist research methods.

**Keywords:** feminist pedagogy, feminist research methods, research methods, reflexive teaching

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When we were in graduate school in the 1980s and 1990s, albeit separated by a decade or more, gender studies was just beginning to be institutionalized as a mainstream field in sociology. Although we both had feminist mentors who taught us feminist approaches to research, there were certainly no feminist methods courses or textbooks. Times have changed, and by some measures, including the publication of textbooks, (e.g., Fonow and Cook 1991; Reinharz and Davidman 1992; DeVault 1999; Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002; Letherby 2003; and Nash 2010; Lewin and Somekh 2011; Hesse-Biber 2014). Feminist approaches to performing social science research have become part of the mainstream of many disciplines. Feminist epistemology, methodology, and scholarship are part of introductory-level textbooks across social science disciplines and are found as components not only in Women and Gender Studies programs but also other programs (e.g., Sociology) in the United States. Special issues of academic journals have also focused on feminist research methods (e.g., the special online issue of *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 2015).

What, then, are feminist research methods and how can they successfully be taught? We understand “feminist” to mean not only a commitment to understanding, exposing, and identifying mechanisms to reducing gender inequalities, but also a commitment, as Patricia Hill Collins and Silma Birge (2016) argue, to intersectional analysis and social justice. Feminism is not simply a theoretical framework, it must guide our actions and we must use it to rectify inequalities. This is precisely the focus of our article. This article is not a critique of feminist methods texts, though we will reference some of these texts, nor is it an evaluation of student learning outcomes. Using the tools provided by Hill Collins and Birge, this article analyzes our attempt to revise and deliver a feminist course with feminist pedagogical strategies that include assessing our approach throughout the semester and revising the course in response to students’ feedback and social actions. Lastly, we argue that effectively teaching feminist methods demands innovative pedagogy and techniques; it is cutting edge, and it is the riskiest but most rewarding kind of teaching we can imagine.

We begin our paper with a comment about the contemporary meaning of feminist research methods. Indeed, our collaboration that led to the development of a feminist methods course sequence, and ultimately to this paper, began as a conversation on this very topic. As feminist social scientists at the same institution, we were concerned by the extent to which many students held misconceptions about feminist research and feminist research methods. We were struck by the material in texts like Kristin Luker's (2008) that still (in the mid 2000's) argued that positivist research methodologies were the norm at most degree granting programs in our discipline; thus, even reading a feminist epistemological or methodological text was seen as subversive. Why would feminists argue that our scholarship and methodologies are not mainstream when an examination of textbooks (e.g., Esterberg 2001; Sprague 2005; Browne and Nash 2010; Hesse-Biber 2014), the popularity of *Gender & Society* (an explicitly feminist social science journal), and the research published in many top social science journals suggests that feminist scholarship is a cornerstone of these disciplines? Is it that we feminists have internalized the oppressed position? Because we are feminists, do we find it challenging to accept that we are in a privileged position in some institutional contexts? Perhaps. In fact, it may be that to specifically identify one's methods as feminist is perceived to be subversive at worst and at best as misunderstood by one's colleagues who evaluate one for advancement. For example, texts like Luker's (2008) that clearly take a feminist approach to research are not identified, even by the author (who identifies her research as feminist in other venues—see, for example, Luker 1984—as feminist).

Or is it the case that feminist scholarship is not often connected explicitly with feminist methods, even in Women and Gender Studies programs? Women and Gender Studies, as a field, grew out of feminist consciousness raising groups that often asked the question “where are the women?” Where were women in literature, in film, in the academy (Ginsburg 2008)? Early scholarship focused on the development of feminist theory, in which debates about epistemology were also critical. It wasn't until later that feminist scholars began to interrogate the role of feminist methodologies and feminist methods in knowledge creation (Sprague 2005). This lack of investment continues. In a report to the National Women's Studies Association, Amy Levine (2007) noted the lack of training in research methods in Women's Studies curriculum, despite the consistent expectation that students engage in some type of research experience as part of their Women's Studies degree.

We became convinced that one key reason for misconceptions about feminist methods is that there seems to be inconsistent discussion in the literature regarding what is meant by feminist research and feminist research methods as pedagogical and methodological concepts (for exceptions, see DeVault (1996) and Chafetz (2004). It became our goal to clarify for ourselves, and our students, the contemporary meaning of feminist research methods and to use this as the guiding set of principles for developing and teaching a combined undergraduate and graduate course sequence on feminist research methods in a Women and Gender Studies program. Here we present the results of our investigation, as well as the preliminary evaluation of the course as a mechanism for not only teaching (feminist) research methods but also for modeling what it is to be a feminist during all parts of the production of scholarship (including the teaching of how to perform research in the first place).

### **What are Feminist Research Methods?**

One key challenge to discussing and teaching feminist research methods is that there is confusion in many texts (and certainly among many academics) regarding the distinctions among feminist methods, feminist methodologies, and feminist epistemology. First, what is feminist research? We argue that feminist research

is any research that has as its goal increasing our empirical understanding of the processes through which inequality (to include gender inequality but also other forms of categorical oppression) are reproduced with an eye toward eradication of that inequality. This research could include micro-level investigations into the experiences of those who are privileged or oppressed as well as structural investigations at the meso or macro levels.

We ground our discussion of the distinctions among methods, methodology, and epistemology in the work of Sandra Harding (1987). Epistemology is a theory about knowledge—who can create and produce knowledge under what circumstances? Feminist scholars have highlighted the fact that throughout history, in the vast majority of disciplines, the privilege of “knowing,” of having access to information, was relegated to white, European and North American, men with high levels of education. As many feminists have argued, this approach produced a narrow range of knowledge based on very limited experiences and perspectives. Feminist epistemology advocates for including people—both researchers and participants—from a wide range of social locations and experiences in the knowledge production process so that subsequent data tell a more inclusive story. Feminist epistemology, then, draws our attention to the ways gender (as one part of individuals’ social locations) influences the production of knowledge. Knowledge is situated (Haraway 1988) and feminist epistemology acknowledges this reality, actively seeking to expand opportunities for the creation and use of knowledge from knowers of all backgrounds and experiences. Feminist epistemology also demands that researchers engage in self-reflection, asking specifically about the impact of their approach on the experiences of participants in the study. Indeed, feminist epistemology makes it clear that feminist research is collaborative, and research participants are also co-collaborators in the creation of knowledge.

Methods are the techniques for gathering and analyzing data, while methodologies are the choices of how to use methods. Methodologies are a set of approaches and philosophies that guide research. Feminist researchers are concerned primarily with gender inequality. Therefore, the methodologies that govern feminist research are those that seek to interrogate gender, the experiences of women and other marginalized populations, including sexual minorities, racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, and those whose gender identity falls on a continuum rather than in a binary. Methods, then, are the nuts and bolts, the tools that researchers use in order to gather data related to their question. Thus, feminist researchers typically develop research questions that focus specifically on gender and inequality. There are no specific tools that are appropriate or inappropriate in seeking answers to questions; rather, the specific methods that are deployed are selected based on the data that the researcher seeks to obtain and the questions they seek to answer. As Joey Sprague writes, “a methodology works out the implications of a specific epistemology for how to implement a method” (2005, 5). The research process relies on a symbiotic relationship between epistemology, methodology, and methods.

Like Sprague, we believe that all research methods (techniques for gathering and analyzing data, for example surveys, case studies, experiments) are, in and of themselves, inherently neutral. Methods are simply skills. Critical researchers, like feminists, can choose to deploy those methods, that is, to construct feminist methodologies that use those techniques in ways that undermine the status quo and give rise to a deeper understanding of how privilege and oppression work and are reproduced and experienced every day. Therefore, we argue that all research methods can be feminist research methods; the key is to know how to construct feminist research methodologies. Learning to ask critical research questions, to be attentive to the relationship between the researcher and the research participants, to construct data collection instruments that are just but also investigate experiences of privilege and domination, and to evaluate existing items, instruments, and data for their biases are all key components of feminist research methodologies.

Designing and teaching feminist methods courses through this framework produces a course that is both philosophical and technical. In our course, students were trained to conduct a survey or analyze secondary data or conduct a textual analysis, but they also developed an understanding of the role that epistemology plays in dictating or revealing both methodological concerns and the selection of appropriate methods. Despite several feminist research methods textbooks (Reinharz and Davidman 1992; Sprague 2005; Hesse-Biber 2014) that argue across three decades about the importance of methods being seen as a technique through which research questions can be answered and that *any* method can be feminist should the researcher choose to approach their question from a feminist perspective, our students (even those who self-identify as feminist) seemed to be influenced by other texts that argued against a perceived positivist bias of particular methods of research. As such, we began to run into difficulty with students who self-identified as feminist refusing to take certain research courses because of a perception of the approach being taught in the class as non- or anti-feminist. More concerning, graduate and undergraduate theses continued to privilege texts that reinforced this misunderstanding, and this was true even among students whose primary field of study was women and gender studies. To be fair, scholarship has documented that texts used in research methods courses are not necessarily the most feminist (Campbell and Schram 1995), nor do feminist research methods texts necessarily provide equal training in all methods (Undurraga 2010). However, as feminists, researchers, and thesis directors, we decided to take Hill Collins and Birge's (2016) call to action seriously and do something to disrupt this problematic trend.

### **One Way to Teach Feminist Research Methods**

The redevelopment of our "Feminist Research Methods" course was a core component of a curriculum development grant awarded by our university to our Women and Gender Studies program. It was implemented as a joint undergraduate and graduate course. In constructing our course, we decided it would be guided by our feminist principles in as many ways as possible. This included a very open classroom with student derived ground rules for discussion as well as other pedagogical practices that facilitated greater participation by all students in all parts of the course, such as the "flipped" classroom, where students become experts alongside of the instructors. But the actual structure of the course needed to be feminist, too. We have included a table (see Table 1) that documents the structure of the course. If one wants to teach students what feminist scholarship looks like, there are a few approaches one could take. One way is to find scholarship that looks feminist (or labels itself feminist) and include it in the syllabus. A more feminist approach is to ask feminists themselves to describe their scholarship, including their research agendas, practices, and products and why they consider their work to be feminist.

After course introductions, the next two weeks of class were dedicated to the class (and the instructors) listening to feminists talk about their work. Consistent with our feminist principles, we asked our guests to describe their work for inclusion in this article; the following descriptions are derived explicitly from their words. Our guests included Professor 1, a scholar of family and education, who employs community-based research (CBR) methods to assist communities in generating data to solve community problems. Professor 2 is an anthropologist who studies gender, race, and class by examining cemeteries and burial practices. Professor 3 is a scholar of higher education who used surveys and interview to study the experiences of women in STEM fields. Professor 4 is a literature scholar who seeks to "discover" the voices of women writers and feminist writing in English literature written during the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Professor 5 is a scholar of higher education who uses case studies to examine transformational pedagogies

for marginalized students and classrooms. Professor 6 is a philosopher, who seeks to give voice to feminist philosophers who are often excluded from the canon and identify and “name” the feminism of those who are included in the canon. Professor 7 is trained in women and gender studies and musicology. She performs textual analysis that focuses on the narratives of LGBTQ asylum seekers. Professor 8 is an education scholar who studies the feminization of the secondary teaching profession and the strategies this largely female profession employs to hold on to its professional status. Finally, Professor 9, an artist, uses photography and film making to create images and short films that expose the impact of dominant lenses and the ways in which works by marginalized artists can disrupt our very way of seeing the world.

Table 1

Course Schedule for “Feminist Research Methods”

### Feminist Research Methods Course Schedule

<p><b>Week One: Getting Started</b></p>	<p>Introductions, syllabus review, class climate discussion. What does it mean to do feminist research? (Read several articles/excerpts in class) and discuss what makes these feminist.</p> <p><u>Readings:</u> *Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy. <i>Feminist Research Practice: A Primer</i>. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014. Chapter 1</p>
<p><b>Weeks Two and Three: Variety of Feminist Approaches</b></p>	<p>During our class sessions each of these two weeks we will have Women &amp; Gender Studies affiliated faculty come to class to give presentations about the ways in which they apply feminist research practices into the research in their disciplinary areas.</p> <p><u>Readings:</u> To be provided by the guests.</p>
<p><b>Week Four: Theory and Methods Intersect</b></p>	<p>Theory-Methods wheel. How does feminist theor(ies) inform feminist approaches to research? What is intersectional theory and how does it shape methodological and epistemological approaches?</p> <p><u>Readings:</u> *Hesse-Biber Chapter 2 *Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo and Tukufu Zuberi. “Toward a Definition of White Logic and White Methods.” Pp. 3-27 in <i>White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology</i> (Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Eds.). New York, Rowman &amp; Littlefield, 2008.</p>
<p><b>Week Five: Ethics</b></p>	<p>A discussion of ethics in research with special attention to marginalized populations (Tuskegee Experiments, Holmesburg Prison, Humphries). Film: <i>Acres of Skin</i></p> <p><u>Readings:</u> *Hesse-Biber Chapter 4</p>

**Feminist Research Methods Course Schedule**

<p><b>Weeks Six and Seven: Experiments</b></p>	<p>Week 6: Discussion of the experimental method, causation and correlation, spuriousness, internal and external validity, random assignment versus random sampling, analyzing experimental data. Special focus on ethics of experiments.</p> <p><u>Readings:</u> *Goar, Carla. “Experiments in Black and White: Power and Privilege in Experimental Methodology.” Pp. 153-162 in <i>White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology</i> (Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Eds.). New York, Rowman &amp; Littlefield, 2008. *Khan, Shamus and Dana R. Fisher. <i>The Practice of Research: How Social Scientists Answer Their Questions</i>. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Chapter 1. *Jordon-Young, Rebecca M. <i>Brainstorm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences</i>. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010. Chapter 3.</p> <p>Week 7: Practice experiments in class and evaluate this method</p>
<p><b>Weeks Eight and Nine: Surveys and Secondary Data Analysis</b></p>	<p>Week 8: Discussion of survey methods, various type of closed and open ended questions, question writing, stems/responses, reliability, validity, sampling techniques, analyzing survey data</p> <p><u>Readings:</u> *Hesse-Biber Chapter 10 *Davis, Shannon N. and Barbara J. Risman. “Feminists Wrestle with Testosterone: Hormones, Socialization, and Cultural Expectations as Predictors of Women’s Gendered Selves.” <i>Social Science Research</i> 49: 110-125, 2015.</p> <p>Week 9: Practice surveys in class and evaluate this method, ICPSR project</p>
<p><b>Weeks Ten and Eleven: Observations &amp; Ethnography</b></p>	<p>Week 10: Discussion of observational techniques including participatory observation, non-participant observation and ethnography. Sampling and variable construction. Special focus on ethics of observation and ethnography. Analyzing observation and ethnographic data.</p> <p><u>Readings:</u> *Hesse-Biber Chapter 5 *Best, Amy. “Doing Race in the Context of Feminist Interviewing: Constructing Whiteness Through Talk.” <i>Qualitative Inquiry</i> 9.6: 895-914, 2003.</p> <p>Week 11: Practice observational techniques and evaluate this method.</p>

### Feminist Research Methods Course Schedule

<b>Weeks 12 and 13: Interviews</b>	<p>Week 12: Discussion of interviewing. Question design, building rapport, sampling and analysis. How do surveys and interviews complement each other?</p> <p><u>Readings:</u> *Hesse-Biber chapters 7 &amp; 8 *Hattery, Angela J. "Sexual Abuse in Childhood – Intimate Partner Violence in Adulthood – Struggles for African American and White Women." <i>Race, Gender &amp; Class</i> 16.1-2: 194-217, 2009.</p> <p>Week 14: Practice interviewing techniques and evaluate this method.</p>
<b>Week 14: Conclusions, final presentations</b>	

These scholars are self-identified feminists who use a plethora of methods and methodologies to answer scholarly questions. As affiliate faculty in an interdisciplinary Women and Gender Studies program, each faculty member is also a potential research mentor, instructor, or advisor for the students in the course. It was our hope that this introduction to Women and Gender Studies faculty and their work would help students overcome their bias toward methods (and even entire disciplines) that yielded more qualitative data and against those that yielded more quantitative data to encourage them to embrace a variety of interdisciplinary methods that can serve the specific research interests of the scholar. We also hoped it would disrupt the commonly held notion that certain methods "belong" to certain fields or disciplines. All of the faculty's work we studied was explicit about choosing methods to answer research questions, rather than choosing research questions that default to specific methods.

A hallmark of feminist approaches is to expand the umbrella of "expertise;" thus, we included not only our colleagues and the students in the classroom, but also our colleagues in the library and data sciences. Inviting our library colleagues to our classroom and encouraging our students to go to data science workshops in the library accomplished our technical goals. Students learned technical skills such as, how to do a comprehensive literature search or how to use statistical software for data analysis. Additionally, this collaboration also facilitated our pedagogical goals, namely impressing upon our students that feminist research is always, in some way, collaborative and draws upon the expertise that exists in many different places both in and outside of the academy.

This joint undergraduate and graduate course had the expectation that students enrolling would be senior-level undergraduates or master's students in the Women and Gender Studies minor (and/or related disciplines). This intentional blending of students also represented a key mechanism by which we constructed the course as a feminist course. Incorporating students at varying levels of experience afforded us the opportunity to construct the classroom using a scaffolding approach to teaching and mentoring. We were not the only experts in the room; students' experience in other courses, their off-campus lives, and their personal lives yielded insight that could be brought to bear on the methodological questions we struggled with each week. Ignoring the standard hierarchies of only the more experienced commenting on others' work, we drew upon these experiences and expertise by asking students to regularly comment on one another's work. Placing undergraduate and graduate students in the classroom together allowed

for all students to learn how to provide effective critiques of others, regardless of their status relative to oneself. Graduate students had more of an incentive to learn how to provide effective feedback and had more experience upon which they could draw. They were able to mentor undergraduate students directly, at times in substantive areas that were quite closely aligned. This scaffolding approach to mentoring is consistent with the aims and goals of the Women and Gender Studies program and is also explicitly feminist.

As described in Table 1, we introduced four different methods (experiments, surveys and secondary data analysis, interviews, and ethnographies) to the students during the course through readings and class discussion. Students organized themselves into groups and performed each of the methods based on research questions that were of their own choosing. The questions students examined ranged from the internalization of rape myths among college students to an investigation of the health care needs of transgender people in a local city. Students used class time to deploy each of the methods. Two weeks later, each group submitted an evaluation of their method and their preliminary data collected. One component of this evaluative paper was a discussion of how the methods they chose were feminist. The specific prompt was: “Discuss the ways in which your project did and did not qualify as feminist research? If it fell short, what would you have to do to change it in order for it to be an example of feminist research?”

We had three specific student learning outcomes for this course. First, we expected students to correctly deploy each of the four research methods taught in the course. Students were expected to be able to ask a research question, determine the correct techniques for answering their question, ethically deploy those methods, and use appropriate evidence to assess both their pilot data and the usefulness of their methods. Second, we expected students to accurately discuss and evaluate their research methodologies in their written work. The evaluative paper needed appropriate terminology for methods throughout and had to acknowledge the limitations of their own application of the methods for answering their research question. Third, we expected students to accurately situate their research methodologies within the “Feminist Research Methods” context. Students were to accurately make claims about their methods in each of the four projects about the extent to which their project qualified as a feminist project.

### **Evaluating our Approach to Teaching Feminist Research Methods**

Though the explicit goal of this paper is not to evaluate student-learning outcomes, we provide a discussion of learning outcomes as a mechanism for illuminating our approach to creating a feminist classroom and, more importantly, a feminist experience. The focus is not so much on the students themselves and their learning, but more on our critical response to ensure that all students had the opportunity to learn equally and in a supportive, feminist manner. We discuss and provide illustrations of each of the three student-learning outcomes (i.e., correctly deploying methods, accurate discussion of methodologies, and accurate discussion of projects as feminist) in turn below.

#### *Correctly Deploying Methods*

Very early on we realized that we had inaccurately assumed that all students, both undergraduates and graduate students, had previously completed a “traditional” research methods class in their own discipline. We structured the course with readings and class discussions that were reflections, critiques, and examples of the methods rather than “how-tos.” Thus, there was unevenness in the students’ abilities to correctly or even confidently deploy the methods as some students had a deeper knowledge of the methods than did

others. Part of the assignment also involved identifying a piece of published research (typically an article, but occasionally a book) that used the same method they were employing to investigate a research question similar to the one they were investigating. For example, if they were using an experiment to test for gender bias by manipulating the names on resumes, then they needed to identify a research project that was similar such as, manipulating names on job applications. Again, we clearly assumed that all the students had done literature searches and could read and interpret research. We also assumed, wrongly, that students would be able to generalize from the research article or book they identified to their own work. In future semesters, in addition to having a reference librarian lead the class in a workshop on strategies for searching the literature, we will expand the workshop to include strategies for reading and interpreting research articles. We will also modify the course to include some very basic methods training related to writing a research question and hypothesis and identifying appropriate methodologies for investigating different questions.

#### *Accurate Discussion of Methodologies*

The unevenness in previous knowledge and experience also led to unevenness in the discussion of the methodologies employed in student projects, at least on the first assignment. After grading the first assignments we went “back to the drawing board” and reorganized our class time. We spent significantly less time on the philosophical issues of method and more time allowing student groups to conduct preliminary literature searches and workshop project designs, and ask practical questions. Additionally, because we believed that the purpose of a feminist research methods course (indeed any research methods course) is to learn, we allowed students to rewrite sections of their papers based on our written and verbal feedback and class discussion. The process of rethinking and reworking our use of class time and allowing for rewrites is a clear illustration of feminist methods. Just as feminists who use interview and/or ethnographic methods often invite the participants to comment on their interpretation of the data, we allowed students and their needs, not our own, to drive the course. As feminists, we saw ourselves as facilitators in the learning and research and not as sole drivers.

#### *Accurate Discussion of Projects as Feminist*

Our most frustrating finding was the continued difficulty our students had in considering projects as feminist projects. Students were very comfortable labeling their interview and ethnography projects as feminist, but it was more of a challenge, especially for the graduate students, to see their experiments and survey projects as feminist. For example, all but one group reported that asking for respondent race and/or gender using closed-ended response categories was “anti-feminist” or “less than feminist” as it privileged the researcher’s understandings of those concepts rather than the respondents’. This response happened despite our assigning readings on the feminist construction and use of survey methods and questionnaires.

Furthermore, it was very common for students to evaluate their research using a very narrow definition of feminism. The following example is from a paper evaluating an experiment manipulating the race of two possible female graduation speakers:

[O]ne aspect that could have made the research stronger within the feminist field is if there was a greater comparison to the preference of male speakers. Implementing a study that changes the gender of the speakers to male would make an interesting comparison to the current data, and would allow researchers to evaluate the discrimination of sex beside race.

Students were comfortable labeling a project about gender discrimination as feminist but less comfortable applying the label of feminist to projects about racial discrimination. Overall, one of our key findings is the deeply ingrained connection students have between certain research methods and feminist practice, despite completing a course that explicitly argued for the application “feminist” to any research method regardless of the methodologies employed.

## **Conclusion**

We conclude by drawing upon our experience to discuss some of the structural and pedagogical challenges of teaching “Feminist Research Methods.” First, as noted above, was the false assumption that students had been exposed to a disciplinary research methods class prior to taking this class. This was especially surprising and perplexing considering the fact that several of the students in the course were doctoral students who had not previously taken a research methods course of any kind. We will modify the course to build in more time to teach basic methods.

Second, though a course in feminist theory was not a prerequisite for the course, we were surprised by the unevenness in familiarity with feminism, despite that all of the students were in some way concentrating in Women and Gender Studies. As we began to write about teaching “Feminist Research Methods” and after conversations with others who teach feminist research methods in the social sciences, it became clear that our approach, and the approach of many feminists teaching feminist research methods—as well as our entire social science discipline—teaches its core courses (i.e., theory, research methods, and data analysis) as if they are completely disconnected from one another. Although both of the authors have been teaching standard research methods courses for decades, it was not until we began to study our own teaching of feminist research methods that this segregated manner of instruction was fully revealed to us.

The lack of familiarity with feminist theory may, in part, explain the difficulty some students had in evaluating their projects as feminist or not despite our intent to highlight the integrated relationships among epistemology, methodology, and methods throughout the course. Although we discussed feminist theory briefly during the course, our evaluation leads us to be more explicit in the inclusion of feminist theory across the entire semester. Students cannot conduct feminist research if they do not have a working knowledge of feminist theory. Assigning readings that focus on feminist theory more generally, as well as readings that offer an intersectional approach, will facilitate understanding of the interconnection between theory and method and expand the understandings of feminism beyond gender inequality to all forms of structural inequality that includes race and ethnicity, sexuality, age, ability, religion, and so forth.

Third, as noted above, one of the primary challenges was dismantling the positivist straw man that many students continued to construct with regards to heavily quantitative methods. In our course, we did not have sufficient time to teach students sophisticated statistical methods (or advanced qualitative analysis), although, students did learn how to perform basic comparisons within their data. In order to continue our quest to dismantle the positivist strawman, we will move beyond relying on a textbook and will assign more quantitative research articles produced by notable feminist scholars in future semesters.

We advocated for a required capstone course within degree programs that affords students the opportunity to conduct an independent research project and be exposed more fully to the relationships among theory, methods, and data analysis. The course we describe here is the first in a two-semester research methods sequence in our Women and Gender Studies program. A strong foundational course, such as the one we describe in this article, can provide the basis upon which a capstone course can be built.

The second course in the sequence we developed, while not required, is designed for students to construct and implement an independent research project throughout the semester. Students are required to use not only a feminist lens to design and conduct their research project, but they synthesize relevant literature and situate their research question within it and they perform relevant data analysis. We see a course like this as a necessary component for women and gender studies programs to underscore the classroom discussions on the connections among epistemology, theory, method, and empirical claims.

Finally, we are pleased, upon reflection and evaluation, to note that we dealt with the challenges in teaching “Feminist Research Methods” by employing decidedly feminist strategies. We created a democratic process by which to both adjust the course plan and provide additional opportunities for learning vis-à-vis project re-writes. This iterative pedagogical practice of continued self-reflection and giving students agency in the process of the course enabled us to teach “Feminist Research Methods” by employing feminist practices. Through this experience, we affirm that feminist pedagogies and the tenets of feminist methodologies can be employed in any kind of classroom and any kind of course content.

What would an introduction to women and gender studies (or sociology) course look like if the instructor routinely encouraged students to struggle with the material in a collaborative environment, for example, with a partner? How would a course on social stratification be strengthened by the inclusion of campus experts whose job it is to ensure equality in hiring? Or inviting staff from all parts of campus—from offices to facilities—to join a class on contemporary families to discuss their strategies for balancing work and family inside the institution of higher education? Collaboration and the expansion of the concept “experts,” as well as an interrogation of the methods used by the discipline to create knowledge, are pedagogical strategies that can be deployed in any environment as long as the instructor is committed to a truly feminist and intersectional approach. This is precisely what Hill Collins and Birge (2016) call us to do: transform the academy through feminist pedagogies and research practices.

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