

# WMNST 602 Methods of Inquiry

Spring 2021

Women's Studies

San Diego State University

## Instructor Contact Information

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Voicemail: 619-594-2861 (TBH: I am horrible about listening to voicemail)

Virtual Office Hours: Fridays 10 am – 12 pm, other appointments may be available on Wednesdays and Fridays

Virtual Office: Please sign up for an appointment for virtual office hours.

## General Course Information

Scheduled Class Days/Time: Tuesdays, 4-6:40 pm

This is a virtual class.

## What is this class about?

We have probably heard the saying “knowledge is power.” We might assume this to mean that having more or better knowledge is powerful, that knowledge is a weapon that we might use in the struggle for social justice and liberation. I myself have thought, “If only more people knew about this particular injustice or inequality, perhaps things would really start to change.” Yet within critical social theory, this phrase has another meaning: knowledge has been used as a weapon of the already powerful to control and subjugate others. Hegemonic discourses structure what counts as knowledge and truth; who is understood to have (or be able to acquire) knowledge; and acceptable processes for acquiring or producing knowledge. These hegemonic discourses gain power for some by claiming “expertise,” all while undermining the credibility and validity of subjugated forms of knowledge and knowers.

Feminist research seeks to center and/or create knowledge that is in the service of justice and liberation for all. This cannot be a process of merely adopting “the master’s tools” of research methods (to borrow from Audre Lorde) and hope that with the right intent, we will produce useful scholarship. Instead, as feminists we must do the deeper work of examining epistemology (“theories of knowledge”) and exploring the power dynamics of the research process (“ethics”). We will have these conversations as we move through the process of learning about different methods that feminist researchers have used to center and create feminist knowledge. We will ask: How do we recover knowledges that have been suppressed by hegemonic discourses? For whom do we create knowledge, and how does that affect our research process? How does our specific social location as researchers affect our process and results? What, or who, is changed by the research process? How

do we avoid “extractive research” that takes without giving back? To put this another way, what do we owe our research “subjects”? What are strategies for “code switching” among various audiences (thesis committees, grant funders, the communities we are accountable to)? Most importantly, how do we center and create knowledge that is in the service of the world we want to create as feminists? Although we will engage in these deep questions, at heart this is a practical course designed to give you the tools and confidence to conduct your own research projects.

**Catalog description:** Examination and critique of traditional research methods; methods of critical feminist investigation; designs of research proposals.

### **What will you learn?**

By the end of this this course you will:

- Describe some of the history of imperialist and heteropatriarchal knowledge production
- Understand the significance of and how to employ a variety of interdisciplinary feminist research methods
- Articulate and evaluate rationales for feminist methodology
- Complete the SDSU Institutional Review Board criteria for research
- Design a feminist research thesis project, and have a draft thesis project proposal prepared

### **What will you read?**

We will be reading a mix of how-to articles, reflections on epistemology and methodologies, illustrations of particular methods, online webinar trainings, sample MA proposals, MA theses, and most of one book:

*Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* by **Linda Tuhiwai Smith**, 2012 (second edition) ISBN: 9781848139503

This book is available at the SDSU bookstore and there is an eBook available through the SDSU library.

### **Additional resources**

Sharlene Hesse-Biber and Patricia Lina Leavy. 2007. *Feminist Research Practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. (There is also a more recent edition, but it isn't available as an eBook.)

This eBook (available through the library) by Hesse-Biber and Leavy provides some practical information about conducting methods. I have listed relevant chapters in the course schedule. If you are particularly interested in using one or more of these methods, you may want to check out the corresponding chapter(s).

Shulamit Reinharz. 1992. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Posted on Canvas as a pdf. Dated, but similarly provides some practical information about conducting methods.

Sharlene Hesse-Biber, ed. 2012. *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Library eBook includes several articles about specific methods that may be of interest.

Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz. 2007. *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*. London: SAGE Publications.

This library eBook provides an overview of grounded theory, a strategy that many social scientific researchers use to approach the dynamic relationship between collecting materials, interpreting them, and writing up findings.

### **What does the professor expect of you?**

- 1. Read the assigned material prior to live class.**
- 2. Check your university e-mail regularly.** Any changes to reading assignments, instructions for completing assignments, and any other announcements will be sent via e-mail.
- 3. Regularly attend and participate in class.** Class discussion will be spent comprehending the arguments made in assigned material, analyzing and evaluating the material, and synthesizing and integrating ideas across assigned readings. *If you have an emergency or serious extenuating circumstance that requires you to miss more than one class periods, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss your situation.*
- 4. Participate respectfully during class time.** We join the virtual classroom from a variety of situations and from different life experiences. Because most of class instruction will be completed on your own time, I ask that you make every attempt to join our Tuesday live session each week, and that you minimize as many distractions as can during the live session. You are encouraged to have your video camera on for the entire live session. During these discussions, you will be asked to abide by some community agreements that we will create together during the first live session.
- 5. Complete all assignments to the best of your ability and on time.** You are responsible for keeping track of when assignments are due. Late policy: I accept assignments *up to one week late for partial credit*. However, if you have an emergency that prevents you from turning in your assignment on time, please come speak with me. Due to the turnaround time for submitting grades, no work will be accepted beyond Thursday, May 13.

### **How will you know you are learning?**

#### **Participation: 5 points**

The usefulness of this class depends entirely on what you put into it. I have invited several guests to come speak about their research materials and methods. To respect their time, I ask that you come prepared with questions for our guest speakers. It will be especially helpful for you to bring questions to the speakers who employ the methods that you are considering. What do you most want to know from someone who has done this type of work before?

#### **Review of MA proposals: 5 points**

Review 3-4 of the sample MA thesis proposals posted on canvas. Identify one that is compelling to you and write a 1-page review. In your review you should: describe what you found to be the strengths of the proposal, and reflect on the relationship between the methods selected and the research questions posed. Will the methods selected be able to address the questions that are posed? How? If not, why not?

**Review of MA theses: 5 points**

Log into SDSUnbound and locate published master's thesis from the Women's Studies department. Read the introductions to at least two theses. Responding to one thesis, write a 1-page review. In your review you should: identify the argument/main point, identify the evidence used to back up the argument/main point, and identify how the evidence was collected (methods). Notice: did the researcher identify any roadblocks or limitations to their project? Did the researcher mention any changes they made in the course of research? What can you learn from these moments?

**Review an article or book that is meaningful to you: 5 points**

Choose a scholarly article or book that is meaningful to you and re-read it, paying attention to the evidence/data and the methods used for collecting that material. Write a 1-page review. In your review you should: identify the argument/main point, identify the evidence used to back up the argument/main point, and identify how the evidence was collected (methods). Do the methods used in this piece appeal to you as something you would like to practice? If not, does it push you in another direction? If yes, what specifically can you borrow as you move into your own research project?

**CITI Training and draft of the IRB application (or alternative): 20 points (5 points CITI Training, 15 points draft application)**

Go to [https://research.sdsu.edu/research\\_affairs/human\\_subjects/guidance](https://research.sdsu.edu/research_affairs/human_subjects/guidance) and learn about the steps to submitting a proposal to the Institutional Review Board of SDSU. Approval from the IRB is necessary for any research (quantitative or qualitative) that involves human subjects – including surveying, interviewing, conducting focus groups, or observing. The first step in the process is to complete an online training that will introduce you some of the ethics of research, mostly framed as what *not* to do. Even if you are not going to need IRB approval, everyone should complete the training and submit your certificate of completion to me for credit.

Those of you who are considering some kind of research that would require IRB approval will then draft a mock application, using the template provided on Canvas. It is okay if you do not quite have all the answers, the purpose is to understand what is required from this process and to begin to consider some of the questions that you will have to address on your application.

If you are 100% confident that you will not need IRB approval – for example, because you are already firmly committed to interpretive methods/cultural studies (such as examining films or literature), or you are firmly committed to archival methods (studying historical primary documents or ephemera) -- then you will do an alternative short assignment that we can design in consultation together.

**Annotated bibliography and outline of literature review: 25 points**

Your thesis proposal, and eventually your thesis itself, will need to demonstrate familiarity with other scholarship that has already been written on the same topic. A literature review is a particular format for demonstrating your knowledge of the scholarly conversation or conversations in which you are entering. To help you prepare for the literature review, you will choose at least 10 books or articles that directly address your topic and write an annotated bibliography. It is okay if some of your materials come from courses you have taken in the program, but some of your materials should also come from secondary research, done through the library. In your annotated bibliography you should: summarize the main argument/main point of the text, and reflect on how the book/article positions itself in relation to larger questions/conversations.

With your annotated bibliography you should draft a one paragraph introduction to your literature review, and outline the rest of your literature review. The literature review is a unique genre of writing that is not the same as describing one book/article in sequence. As you shift from the annotated bib to the lit review, your job will be to put these texts in conversation with each other. What conversations are these researchers having with each other? What things do some of them agree on? What are the points of disagreement? Are there any gaps or omissions that you have observed? Are there concepts or frameworks that you would like to borrow in order to apply to new material in an innovative way?

**Draft thesis proposal and workshop: 35 points (30 points for proposal, 5 points for presentation)**

You will submit a draft thesis proposal including three key components: 1. An introduction to your topic and your research questions. 2. A literature review. 3. A description of methods. Your final thesis proposal will also include chapter outlines, a proposed timeline, and a bibliography. While those pieces are not required for this assignment, you are strongly encouraged to consider adding a timeline to this draft, so that you can begin to prepare for your upcoming project.

The approximate length of your thesis will be around 75 pages. Your thesis proposal should be far more succinct, somewhere in the realm of 12-20 pages. Hot tip: Your goal is to get approval to do your research, and then have adequate time to research and write up your findings. If you spend significant time on the proposal, it takes away from doing the actual research and writing. The piece of writing you work on for this class does not necessarily have to be the proposal that you present to your committee, but the more of a full draft of a proposal you can turn into for credit for this class, the closer you will be to starting your research project (potentially this summer!).

You will take turns presenting your proposal during the last three weeks of the semester, an opportunity for you to get feedback from your professor and peers. Plan to present for ~15 minutes, with 15-20 minutes for response. Please prepare some kind of visual aid for your presentation, such as a one-page handout or short slideshow.

**Overall grades will be based on the following points earned (out of 100 possible points):**

A = (93-100); A- = (90-92)  
B+ = (87-89); B = (83-86); B- = (80-82)  
C+ = (77-79); C = (73-76); C- = (70-72)  
D+ = (67-69); D = (60-66)  
F = ( $\leq$  59)

Note: At any point in the course, you can estimate your grade by adding up the points you have earned and compare that to the remaining points available.

**Other important things to know**

Students are responsible for being familiar with the university wide policies found at: [https://arweb.sdsu.edu/es/catalog/GC1617/143\\_UniPolicies.pdf](https://arweb.sdsu.edu/es/catalog/GC1617/143_UniPolicies.pdf).

## **Content warning**

All women's studies course may encounter at some point texts discussing sexual violence and state-sponsored violence. Please reach out for support from me or the following resources if you are experiencing distress due to this content.

- Campus-based Counseling and Psychological Services, M-F 8 am – 4 pm: 619-594-5220
- San Diego Access & Crisis Phone Line available 24/7: 1-888- 724-7240
- San Diego Access & Crisis Chat Line available M-F 4-10 pm:  
<https://svcrplv.uhc.com/sdchat/>

## **Disability and Access Information**

I invite all students to communicate their other access needs with me. If you have a campus accommodation letter, it would be helpful to get a copy as soon as possible.

If you think that you could benefit from an accommodation, even if you do not yet have a learning disability or psychiatric diagnosis, or if you are experiencing a new or temporary disability caused by injury, please contact the Student Ability Success Center and they will go through the process with you. Visit: [http://go.sdsu.edu/student\\_affairs/sds/services-overview.aspx](http://go.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/sds/services-overview.aspx). (619) 594-6473.

## **Academic honesty**

I encourage students to study together and to talk about their ideas for the exams together. However, any work that you turn in **must be in your own words**. In order to be give credit to the ideas of others, any phrase, sentence or paragraph that is an exact copy of what somebody else wrote (or said) should be attributed to the author (or speaker) by name and include a page number. In addition, any idea from an author or theorist that you use in your work, even if it is not a direct quote, should also be attributed to that author by name. To present someone else's words as your own is considered plagiarism, whether you intended to steal their work or not. Students who are found to be plagiarizing, whether intentionally or not, will be subject to penalty. This can include: receiving a zero on the assignment or exam, receiving a failing grade in the course overall, or being referred to student conduct.

## **Sexualized Violence and Reporting Requirements**

All employees are required to report incidences of sexual assault and sexual harassment to the campus Dean of Students office. That means that professors and other employees who become aware of sexual assault or harassment must contact the Title IX office. HOWEVER, it would be YOUR choice to pursue any action beyond the initial report. You do not have to talk to the university at any point, even if a report is made about you. Anyone who would prefer to talk to someone confidentially about sexual assault or harassment can contact:

- Counseling & Psychological Services (see above)
- Campus-based Sexual Violence Advocate & Educator, [Calpulli Center](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, [\(619\) 594-0210](#)
- Center for Community Solutions (CCS), 24-Hour Hotline: [\(888\) 385-4657](#) (Bilingual)

## Course Schedule

*Subject to change with fair notice. Changes will be emailed and posted to Canvas.*

Week/ Date	Readings – to be completed by class time	Live session	Deadlines –due by class time unless otherwise specified
2 Jan 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Requirements for Master’s Degrees” from the SDSU Catalog</li> <li>• “Master’s Degree – Procedural Steps” from SDSU</li> </ul>	<p><i>Introductions and overview of master’s research process</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductions</li> </ul> <p>Guest: <b>Amira Jarmakani</b> (Women’s Studies)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amira will give us an overview of MA research options: thesis, project, or exam; deadlines and timelines</li> <li>• Free write exercise and discussion of your ideas for research/project topics and materials/evidence/data</li> <li>• Overview of the class</li> </ul>	
3 Feb 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Chapters 2-5 and 9 from <i>Decolonizing Methodologies</i></li> <li>• Oyeronke Oyewumi, “Visualizing the Body: Western Theories and African Subjects”</li> </ul>	<p><i>Power/Knowledge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion of Oyewumi and Smith</li> <li>• Discussion of reviewed MA proposals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of MA proposals due</li> </ul>
4 Feb 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donna Haraway “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”</li> <li>• Patricia Hill Collins “Black Feminist Epistemology”</li> </ul>	<p><i>Feminist standpoint theory</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion of Haraway, Collins, and Scott</li> <li>• Discussion of reviewed MA theses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of MA thesis due</li> <li>• The topic of WMNST 692 this week will be how to write a Lit Review</li> </ul>

Week/ Date	Readings – to be completed by class time	Live session	Deadlines –due by class time unless otherwise specified
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joan Scott – “The Evidence of Experience”</li> <li>• OPTIONAL: Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Chapter 11 from <i>Decolonizing Methodologies</i></li> <li>• OPTIONAL: Robert McRuer and Merri Lisa Johnson “Cripistemology”</li> </ul>		
5 Feb 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Annotated Bibliographies”</li> <li>• Complete the CITI training – will take a few hours</li> </ul>	<p><i>Library research and research ethics</i></p> <p>Guest speaker: <b>Laurel Bliss</b> (library) on resources and strategies for library research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of annotated bibliographies</li> <li>• Zotero – a helpful software</li> <li>• Discussion of CITI training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CITI training (upload a copy of certificate of completion for credit)</li> </ul>
6 Feb 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Esther Rothblum, et al, “Studying the Longest ‘Legal’ U.S. Same-Sex Couples: A Case of Lessons Learned”</li> <li>• Margaret Price and Stephanie Kerschbaum “Stories of Methodology: Interviewing Sideways, Crooked, and Crip”</li> </ul> <p>In <i>Feminist Research Practice</i> see:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “In-Depth Interviewing”</li> <li>• “Focus Group Interviews”</li> </ul>	<p><i>Surveys, interviews, and focus groups</i></p> <p>Guest speakers: <b>Esther Rothblum</b> (Women’s Studies) and <b>Angela Coker</b> (Women’s Studies) (both can also answer questions about the IRB process)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of the IRB process</li> <li>• Maintaining confidentiality and storing materials</li> </ul>	

Week/ Date	Readings – to be completed by class time	Live session	Deadlines –due by class time unless otherwise specified
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Mixed-Methods Research”</li> <li>• “Survey Research”</li> </ul> <p>In Reinharz see chapters 2, 4, and 11</p>		
7 March 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AJ Kim “The Gentrification of ‘Sharing’: From Bandit Cab to Ride Share Tech”</li> <li>• María Ibarra “The Ties That Bind: Mexicana Caretakers and Aging Americans Construct Kinship”</li> </ul> <p>In <i>Feminist Research Practice</i> see: “Ethnography”</p> <p>In Reinharz see chapter 3</p>	<p><i>Field work, ethnography, and mapping</i></p> <p>Guest speakers: <b>AJ Kim</b> (City Planning) and <b>Shabna</b> (visiting Fulbright Scholar)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of favorite book/article</li> </ul>
8 March 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incite! Women of Color Against Violence “Participatory Action Research”</li> <li>• Shannon Speed “At the Crossroads of Human Rights and Anthropology: Toward a Critically Engaged Activist Research”</li> <li>• SKIM: Black Women Birthing Justice “Battling Over Birth: Black Women &amp; The Maternal Health Care Crisis in California”</li> <li>• OPTIONAL: Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Chapters 6-7 from</li> </ul>	<p><i>Community action research and research justice</i></p> <p>Guest speaker: <b>Megan Welsh</b> (Public Affairs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies for making your research accessible to communities</li> </ul>	<p>(The topic of WMNST 692 this week will be how to write a methods section)</p>

Week/ Date	Readings – to be completed by class time	Live session	Deadlines –due by class time unless otherwise specified
	<p><i>Decolonizing Methodologies</i></p> <p>In Reinhartz see chapter 10</p>		
9 March 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Saidiya Hartman “Venus in Two Acts”</li> <li>José Esteban Muñoz “Ephemera as Evidence”</li> </ul>	<p><i>Archives and genealogy</i></p> <p>Guest Speakers: <b>Victoria González-Rivera</b> (Chicana/o Studies) and <b>Amanda Lanthorne</b> (SDSU Special Collections and University Archives)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tips for finding existing archives and the strange experience of visiting them</li> <li>Digital archives in the age of COVID</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annotated Bib and outline of literature review due</li> </ul>
10 March 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sara Ahmed “A Willfulness Archive”</li> <li>Alison Kafer “Debating Feminist Futures: Slippery Slopes, Cultural Anxiety, and the Case of the Deaf Lesbians”</li> </ul> <p>In <i>Feminist Research Practice</i> see: “Content Analysis”</p> <p>In Reinhartz see chapter 8</p>	<p><i>Cultural studies, literary studies, visual studies, and performance studies</i></p> <p>Guest Speaker: <b>Anne Doneday</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Technology and software share: do you use software or digital tech to you organize your materials? Do you plan to use any interpretive software? Come prepared to share!</li> <li>Low-fi strategies for interpreting materials: the journal and highlighter method, mind maps, and story boards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sign up for thesis proposal dates</li> </ul>
March 30		No live session today – SDSU day of rest	
11 April 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Irene Lara “Abrazos de Conocimiento Across the Generations”</li> <li>Cindy O. Fierros and Dolores Delgado Bernal “Vamos a Platicar”</li> </ul>	<p><i>Oral history and social documentation</i></p> <p>Guest Speakers: <b>Irene Lara</b> (Women’s Studies) &amp; <b>Evan Apodaca</b> (documentary film maker)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IRB proposal draft due or alternative assignment</li> <li>(The topic of WMNST 692 this week will be how</li> </ul>

Week/ Date	Readings – to be completed by class time	Live session	Deadlines –due by class time unless otherwise specified
	<p>In <i>Feminist Research Practice</i> see: “Oral History”</p> <p>In Reinharz see chapter 7</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial thoughts on moving from interpretation to writing a thesis</li> </ul>	to write an abstract)
12 April 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Catherine Clune-Taylor “Is Sex Socially Constructed?”</li> <li>Marie Draz “From Duration to Self-Identification?”</li> </ul>	<p><i>Feminist science and technology studies; Queer and trans theory</i></p> <p>Guest speakers: <b>Catherine Clune-Taylor</b> (Women’s Studies) and <b>Marie Draz</b> (Philosophy)</p>	
13 April 20		<i>Thesis proposal presentations</i>	
14 April 27		<i>Thesis proposal presentations</i>	
15 May 4		<i>Thesis proposal presentations</i>	Final draft thesis proposals due May 4 (for credit in this class)
Finals Week		We will not meet this week- enjoy your summer of research	