Abstract: Ten contemporary feminists who are entering Canadian graduate programs in Women’s and Gender studies produced this collective snapshot of (dis)courses about transitions in the field. They explore the boundaries of activism and academics; discuss debates surrounding post-feminism and third-wave; and deliberate on the challenges of transnationalism and globalization. The fundamentals of feminist knowledge-building are addressed through their examination of “What does it mean to say feminists know?”, “What constitutes feminist ethical frameworks?” and, “Are there feminist methods?” New frontiers of feminism are also considered, especially in relation to transhumanism, (dis)ability, and the nonhuman. Despite differences in their respective views, these emerging scholars are connected by a refusal to accept binaries, an insistence on supporting diversity, a passion for working across boundaries, and a dedication to delivering solutions in a world of seismic changes. Aware of feminisms past and with fresh visions for equality, their voices offer insights into future directions.
Introduction

The often conflicting, sometimes collaborative, and almost always self-reflexive (dis)courses of emerging Canadian academic feminists are cause for attention and celebration. For their contributions enrich and transform feminist knowledge-building and action by adding depth and scope to current issues. They also forge new avenues of thought and exploration. Despite exhibiting a wide scope of differing subjectivities and perspectives, these new scholars are connected by a staunch refusal to accept binaries, an insistence on acknowledging and tolerating differences, a passion for working across boundaries, and a dedication to delivering solutions in a world of seismic changes and formidable challenges. Aware of feminisms past, and with fresh visions for equality and social justice, their voices offer insights into future directions.

Feminist scholarship, as a specialized interdisciplinary field of study in Canada, has been intertwined with the academy in unconventional ways since the advent of Women’s Studies programs in the 1960s. Fueled by the expansion of higher education and the activist political forces of feminist movements during the mid-twentieth century, the programs were initially formed through the efforts and expertise of female faculty from diverse disciplines with the intention to challenge established patriarchal canons and to broaden horizons of undergraduate education. Developments and transformations during the last quarter of the twentieth century include the creation of theoretical frameworks, the production of innovative teaching and research practices, an increase of interdisciplinary interactions, and the establishment of graduate programs. Since its inception, both within and outside the university system, the legitimacy of academic feminist scholarship has been repeatedly called into question, regularly attacked, and subjected to ongoing scrutiny. Yet, the field has continued to strengthen and flourish in the twenty-first century. Many incoming professors now hold doctorates in Women’s and Gender studies and there is a growing community of academic feminists who share a commitment for social justice while acknowledging significant differences with regard to perceptions about social issues.

As an emerging cohort of contemporary feminists in Canada enters graduate programs in Women’s and Gender studies, they respond to old debates with new concerns and questions. Drawing upon this vibrant source of knowledge, I organized a special topics seminar dedicated to exploring transitions in the field. The courses consisted of six fourth-year undergraduate students from Carleton University, Ottawa, who intended to pursue graduate work in Women’s and Gender studies and four first-year Master’s students. The academic level of the participants assured a solid grounding in feminist scholarship, but one that was positioned between closure of a broad education and entry into advanced individual research. At such thresholds, common patterns are dislodged, continuities of thought become unsettled, and a unique space unfolds for the flow of overlapping and competing ideas. Thus, an open attitude framed the Transitions seminar and resulted in a series of profound and wide-ranging discussions on the current state of feminism and feminist scholarship. The collaborative outcome of those conversations shapes this collective snapshot of the voices, viewpoints, and investigations of the ten participants, who individually and as a group provide insight into the dynamic shifts in contemporary feminist identities and knowledge-building.

The Transitions seminar reflected the multicultural dimensions of Canada in the class demographics, and this diversity contributed to individual points of departure in perceptions and logic. For example, there were a variety of gender identities and sexual orientations within the group; participants hailed from the Middle East, Southeastern Europe, Central America, as well as a number of Canadian regions; and First Nations and a range of religious and philosophical backgrounds were represented. There were also striking differences in terms of feminist scholarly interests, theoretical frameworks, discursive styles, and activist experiences.

Course format and requirements encouraged further distinctions in expertise and understanding. Each class participant had to: 1) select a topic from the syllabus outline; 2) deliver a two-page document and oral presentation that explained and defended his or her position on the selected topic; 3) experience critique by class members; and 4) revise the two-page text based on the peer discussion and written commentary. The overall goal was to expose and engage neophyte feminist scholars in the variety of
debates existing in the field and also to initiate a sense of a professional identity in their work.

The arrangement of course topics was designed to help the participants frame their own positions relative to key internal deliberations and research practices within the field of Women’s and Gender Studies, and in relation to broader cultural, political, and intellectual developments. Three overarching themes guided the series of conversations that emerged in the overall presentation of course material. The first section of the course focused on articulating the situated terms of contemporary feminist identities and scholarship within the domains of feminist Western history, activist and academic communities, popular culture, and globalization (Sarah McCue, Emily Macdonald, Stacey Dinya, and Devyn Stackhouse). Fundamentals of knowledge-building and feminist research were addressed through an interrogation of such questions as “What does it mean to say feminists know?” (Ivana Kolakovic); “What constitutes feminist ethical frameworks?” (Narges Sahebi) and, “Are there feminist methods?” (Chantine Beeso). Finally, new frontiers of feminist scholarship were considered, especially as they relate to trans(post)humanism, (dis)ability, and the nonhuman (Rebekah Elkerton, Evelyn Boy-Mena, and Maria Vicente). Each contribution is composed through the trope of the hyphen, which suggests a negotiation that simultaneously joins and separates concepts. In so doing, the following essays reveal contradictions and confluences in and among these transitional issues, thus avoiding balkanizing contemporary feminist (dis)courses into competing and mutually exclusive categories, or periodizing feminist thought into a simple progressive narrative.

The stances advanced by the ten participants of the Transitions seminar underscore that scholarship in Women’s and Gender Studies is polyphonic instead of monolithic. The diversity was more pronounced than any commonality in the group. So, an aim for consensus was rejected in favor of animation and examination of ideas. Collaboration was achieved on the premise that the wisdom of knowledge-building is founded on respectful relationships and listening with humility. Thus, the positions put forth by these emerging scholars is supported through an agreed upon process of discussion and negotiation instead of any unified vision.

Feminism Waves—Postfeminism
Sarah McCue

Throughout Western histories, feminist theories and movements have been structured through metaphors of conflict and waves. The second wave responded to the limits of first wave by problematizing the social roles associated with traditional gender boundaries. Contemporary feminists have been told that the third wave mimics the challenge of the second wave with a movement spawned by grrrl punk, DIY zines, and academics developing intersectional, post-structural and post-colonial knowledge. The development of the third wave, which supports feminist knowledge and movements, was paralleled by the emergence of postfeminism—a narrative that acts against those goals. While third wave is regularly referenced in current feminist academic and activist circles, the dominant public narrative around gender has been postfeminist. Postfeminism emphasizes that the battles have been won by past feminists and demonizes the contemporary feminist movement as exclusionary and outdated. The hegemonic power of the postfeminist backlash and discourse has recently begun to crack in the wake of widespread disillusionment following the 2008 global economic crisis, and the third wave that we have been riding theoretically may only now be evolving into a feminist-based social movement.

“Third wave” in Western discourse came, quite literally, out of a mother-daughter metaphor as advanced through Rebecca Walker’s 1992 essay in Ms. Magazine, “Becoming the Third Wave.” While the end of the second wave was marked by an ongoing debate between protection of women and liberation of bodies, the third wave rhetoric declared that sex-positivity had won, while the rest of the political and structural goals of the second wave were diminished in favour of a media-friendly message of “choice” and “individualism.” However, the third wave emerged not only out of a critique of feminisms past, but also from the triumph of democracy and neoliberalism globally. The end of the Cold War marked a new global order where American hegemony dictated morals that assume, according to James Hay, that “social subjects are not and should not be subject to direct forms of State control.” This individualizing message of freedom has become so entrenched in
Western realities that it has, if not co-opted, then altered and muted the new third-wave movement. Postfeminism has thrived in this cultural and economic juncture. The mainstreaming of the feminist movement through equal rights doctrines of the second wave has been used to build this new postfeminist framework that declares the triumph of an overarching social and formal “equality” for all. The neoliberal focus on individualism and freedom has allowed the feminist message to be altered and carried through capitalist means. The postfeminist discourse relies on the idea of “successful (white) femininity”, following the “Horatio Algers” myth of the American dream; a postfeminist woman is self-made and not encumbered by sexism or sisterhood, whereas feminism is seen as a victimizing doctrine that seeks to divide society based on power structures of the past.  

Today we stand surrounded by postfeminist messages, in a political sphere where free markets and individualism reign. The opportunity for furthering community building and political progress of equity is approaching, but the third wave has not yet achieved these goals. The third wave has gained theoretical backing through the academy but in the wake of the 2008 crisis will find footing amongst disillusionment to mature as a transformative social movement.

Feminist Academics—Feminist Activism

Emily Macdonald

My self-identification as a young feminist scholar began in my second year of undergraduate study. That is when I discovered “The Vagina Monologues”. I was inspired to find a body of people who had the same passion that I did for expressing female empowerment, and for studying and fighting for gender equality and social justice. In researching Eve Ensler’s work, I knew I wanted to take part in educating others and to be involved in the Carleton University’s campus and wider Ottawa community activities that would aid rape crises centers and women’s shelters. Now, in pursuing graduate work in Women and Gender Studies, I am furthering my goals of developing scholarly abilities, activism, and my feminist identity.

In the article “What’s Political about the New Feminism?”, Carisa Showden reasserts a common charge that has been put forward by a number of groups and scholars: “Third-wave feminists have generally provided a weak argument for the political significance of their cultural interventions, and have yet to articulate the relationship to feminism of such interventions.”10 I disagree with her statement based on my personal experiences in being a young academic and activist within my community. I believe that political significance continues to be a prerequisite for contemporary feminism due to the condition that the “personal is political”.

For many young feminist academics like myself, the “personal is political” slogan has shifted its meaning from the traditional sense of second-wave feminists, who initially used it to create awareness of how private decisions were affected by political forces. Now it is also interpreted to mean that individual actions can have political impact. Despite charges by Showden and others accusing young women’s feminisms of “taking their own concerns and identifying them with contemporary feminism as a whole,” we do not reject the second-wave concepts but use them (and others) to critique and rethink contemporary feminist scholarship and activist work. 11 This generation of feminists is well-rounded, diverse, and has made academic and community contributions; thus, we accept differences in feminist discourses and recognize the political implications and consequences of intersectionality in personal and group actions.

The equality within coalition partnerships between academic and community researchers is also often called into question. For example, Barbara Cottrell and Jane Parpart declare that feminist coalition work, “…has involved academics’ appropriation of community work, the creation of hierarchy between those who “think” (i.e. academics) and those who “do” (i.e. community based researchers).”12 The authors further charge that such partnerships are primarily motivated by the requirements of project funding needed by academics. 13 Although there are certainly power differentials and differences in any coalition, I argue that for one to be considered a feminist academic, one also must be a self-identified activist, as political vision is crucial for feminist scholarship. Through producing research and building networks, academics foster knowledge, innovation, and opportunities for feminist developments across academic and community borders. Academic and community research collaboration is based on a shared commitment to social transformation and participants
work together towards equality by means of a respectful acknowledgement of differences, effective communication, and empathy towards one another.

A young feminist academic-activist perspective fosters political significance. Writing and theorizing work enriches the development of feminist knowledge-building, which is inseparable from activism. Academics work as activists and with activists. It is time to dismiss the false allegations of divisions between the academy and community and between generations of feminist academic-activists.

Intersectionality—Difference
Stacey Dinya

New developments in concepts of intersectionality are modeling deeper analysis and thought for both feminist practice and theory. The term “intersectionality”, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s, describes how forms of difference that comprise one’s identity correlate. Crenshaw initially identified intersectionality by using the “metaphor of intersecting roads to describe and explain the ways in which racial and gender discrimination compounded each other.” Many feminists now consider Crenshaw’s original definition for intersectionality as too simplistic. More complex metaphors have emerged in feminist scholarship in which an individual’s gender, race, class, sexuality, and other markers of identity cannot coexist or be evaluated on their own, but must be analyzed and understood as interlocking and dynamic conditions.

Patricia Hill Collins developed a revised approach to intersectionality at the turn of the twenty-first century with her “Matrix of Positionality”, which utilizes a Foucauldian understanding of power. Her model shows how “differentiation and systems of domination interrelate.” Whereas previous descriptions of intersectionality maintain set boundaries, the matrix has “shifting fusions of multilayered and relational differences.” For example, if we were to employ Crenshaw’s description of intersectionality, we would classify people based only on broad and stable categories of race and gender, such as identifying someone as being an “Asian woman”. By using Collins’ matrix, multiple axes of identity are considered and in this case, the person’s background of perhaps being both Japanese and Chinese would be considered as well as her gender, age, and socio-geographical location as functional and dynamic elements of her identity. The matrix model of intersectionality, in comparison to Crenshaw’s metaphor of intersecting roads, offers more positions and fluidity of difference.

By opening and developing the lens of intersectionality, we can further apply a matrix metaphor to studies of inequalities and differences. In this regard, the matrix metaphor can be used for collaborative meaning-making. In our case, as a group of young feminist scholars sitting in a university classroom together, it is clear that we do not share the same views, ethnic backgrounds or gender identifications; however, we do agree upon a broad goal of recognizing and challenging systems of oppression. Rather than having a “crash” between how we prioritize oppressions, we “work together on the basis of a shared vision for change” that allows for interlinking multiple positions. By forming such coalitions, it is more difficult for oppressors to categorize individuals or groups simply based on physical appearance or other identity signifiers, and it promotes further investigation on how a group interrelates, coexists, and takes action.

Intersectionality is a prime framework for contemporary feminist research, knowledge-building, and activism. As feminisms develop so too will the models of intersectionality. The shift from a crossroads to a matrix of positionality demonstrates how feminist academics are developing more sophisticated understandings of systems of power and oppressions in order to better dismantle barriers that confine people into fixed and/or marginalized social categories based on difference.

Feminist Positions--Geographical Locations
Devyn Stackhouse

Post-colonial and transnational feminisms face many challenges reconciling uneven power-relations. Specifically, while privileged feminist scholars and activists seek a paradigm for cross-border collaboration, they are bound to vigilance against the imposition of exogenous values and knowledges into the representations and political agendas of those struggling. In this short essay, I demonstrate that working across borders in foreign communities requires the utmost of academic and compassionate
rigour if feminists are to avoid perpetuating a neo-colonial project.

Transnational feminisms, concerned with the Earth’s socio-political systems in relations of unevenness and mobility, are characterized by the tension between desires for political action and caution over re-colonizing indigenous knowledges and bodies.\(^{21}\) Consider that most “Global Sisterhood” feminisms seek liberal rights for women. Nation states are the institutions that assume the duties correlated to citizen rights; therefore, the choice of the women’s rights paradigm is rife with political posturing that legitimates the liberal democratic nation as ideal. Humaira Saeed asserts “critics often identify the motivation of a desire for international feminist solidarity, but often this desire can exacerbate inequalities and de-radicalize and fragment local feminist politics through privileging Western-style priorities.”\(^{22}\) Transnational and Post-colonial feminisms have asked, “Is this not neo-colonialism, where, once again, ‘backward’ people are being told how to civilize themselves?” In a similar vein, the concept that assistance requires an understanding of those being helped is accompanied by a very real risk that an activist will misunderstand a practice or idea and report on it erroneously and with authority. Tension, therefore, exists between the transnational feminist goals of preserving and assisting oppressed communities.

Transnational and post-colonial feminisms have much work to accomplish in addressing injustices committed by colonial ethnographies. These feminists acknowledge the role knowledge production played in establishing colonial rule and reject the homogenous category of “women’s oppression” as sufficient to frame gendered experience in a reality wherein “we” are all implicated. Post-colonial feminists have critiqued how Euro-colonial knowledges violently replaced entire indigenous systems of belief and imposed cis-binary gender onto many civilizations that had self-defined otherwise. For example, even here in Canada, Two Spirited aboriginals have been and continue to be regulated into colonial binary gender categories.

With cautions noted, I do believe in the potential for transformative transnational activism. To begin to articulate a strategy, I offer Saeed (based on ideas advanced by Chandra Mohanty) on solidarity as “the ethical way of crossing borders, where the difference born of distinct locations is honoured but does not become a reason for avoiding coalition work across difference.”\(^{23}\) Moreover, according to Saeed, the notion that post-colonial work “centres on narratives, honouring their subjective positions as the ones who have the most authority to talk about their own positions” is paramount to approaching transnational relations.\(^{24}\) If feminists and research participants meet as experts in their own experiences, they can choose to share resources and ideas without the prescriptive elements of problematic “West knows best” or “white saviour” feminisms.

I continue to hold some reservations about ethnography in post-colonial and transnational feminist scholarship. My understanding of post-colonial and post-structural theories generates doubts of whether an ethnographic project can be compatible with political goals inherent to feminist work. The ethnographic method does not meet my threshold for allowing sufficient self-representation, even when paired with reflexive exercises. Alternatively, I recommend more participatory and collaborative methods that share control of research projects, where possible, to maximize the authenticity of data.

Transnational and post-colonial feminisms are inherently laden with philosophical debates, which are defined in response to uneven power dynamics and difficult social relations. Ultimately, one of the most problematic tensions results from feminist activism and scholarship that strays from the compassionate and academic rigour that is required to approach cross-border feminism and actions.

**Feminist Scholarship—“Truth” Criteria**

*Ivana Kolakovic*

Carl Rogers, psychologist, defines cognitive empathy as the “cognitive capacity to adopt the perspective of another person.”\(^{25}\) This ability means to sense another’s feelings and points of view as if they were your own, but without losing the “as if” quality. Can this ability become one possible instrument for knowledge-building and also one of the possible foundations of feminist epistemology in the deeply skeptical postmodern era?

In modern philosophy, influential epistemological ideas were formulated in René Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641).
According to Decartes’ doctrine, true knowledge can appear only in the free space of meditating subjectivity, and therefore it is always apolitical, ahistorical and not culturally limited. A self-conscious (and exceptionally white male) knower is per se guarantor of all knowledge: he is able to represent the world accurately, to mirror it in his mind.

Postmodern thinkers reject the knowledge guided by privileging rational discourse, and they also challenge the Cartesian dichotomy between the subject and object of knowledge. Friedrich Nietzsche (and Michel Foucault after him) criticized the subject-centered project of reason and argued that there is no transcendental subject but instead a subject who is always historically situated. There is no position outside of history; no one can take a neutral stance. Influenced by these ideas, Foucault provided one of the strongest critiques of modern Western epistemology by arguing that knowledge is always connected to power.²⁶

Inspired by Foucault and Nietzsche, feminists created standpoint theories as a location from which it is possible to articulate counter-knowledge and speak from multiple points, thereby providing multiple truths.²⁷ By giving voice to those who are marginalized, standpoint theorists initially believed that privileging the experiences of the oppressed would prevent the re-creation of totalizing and discriminatory understandings of the world. These theorists, such as Nancy Harstock, think that a power-free society is possible. Thus, the standpoint theorists’ notion of power is still traditional: from this perspective, knowledge and power are possessed and they are primarily repressive, negative forces that produce nothing but limits and lack. To the contrary, Foucault argues that this traditional notion of power is too narrow, because power is neither an entity, nor a capacity, nor a quality, but rather only exists in action and in play.²⁸ Thus, he asserts that power is productive, has no single source and is capillary omnipresent.

Feminist postmodern theorists, such as Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler, strongly influenced by Foucault’s notions of power, want to grasp the more delicate and subtle ways in which power is exercised. They argue that the knower is not unchangeable; s/he is always produced and reproduced, established and reestablished throughout history.²⁹ According to postmodern logic, humans cannot escape power relations. In other words, there is no innocent theoretical position that is liberatory and permanent: “…the claim of every particular knower reflects a particular perspective shaped by social, cultural, political, personal factors, and each perspective has its blind spots.”³⁰ If the postmodern knower/subject is not fixed, stable or authoritative, and if the knowledge is always situated, particular, and multivocal, feminist knowledge-building becomes a complex and dispersive process.

What does it mean then, in the postmodern era, to say that feminists know? How can feminism(s) respond to the dangers of skepticism? If we start to look at the process of knowledge-building as not having a specific destination but instead as a process of “wandering in-between while making sense of living”; and if we start to learn how to embrace the uncertainty and changeable nature of everything, we can at least prevent some of the violence and destruction born from the “will to truth”.³¹ Still, the question remains as to whether it enough only to prevent some of the violence and destruction.

Through understanding and implementing cognitive empathy as intentional practice, actions toward social change can be found. Cognitive empathy can help feminists overcome the exclusiveness of standpoint theory, and also address the potential skepticism of postmodernist epistemology. Adopting the perspectives of one another can be the way in which dispersive pieces of our realities can be recognized as decisive.

**Feminist Practice—Ethical Frameworks**

*Narges Sahebi*

Feminist ethics situate women’s moral development as a part of human experiences and challenge androcentric views of traditional ethics.³² While Hilde Lindemann asserts that feminist ethics use gender as a lens, it is not a new form; instead feminisms extend and adapt traditional Western ethics frameworks in an ongoing process.³³ Therefore, it is relevant to ask, what is the traditional approach to ethics? And what are the key feminist critiques and contributions?

From Aristotle to contemporary philosophies, Western ethics have been created and developed based on the concept of how others should be treated.³⁴
Aristotle clearly considered ethics to be for the male ruling class elites. The masculinist standards underpinning this classical ethical framework became further rooted in the European Enlightenment principles of rights, justice, duty, and consequences. During the twentieth century, Feminism claimed that women share a common humanity with men and thus society has to respect both men and women equally. As such, one of the consequences was acknowledgement of the application of Enlightenment principle-based ethics to women’s issues. However, as Rosemarie Tong and Nancy Williams observe: “[the Enlightenment ethical framework] favors ‘male’ ways of moral reasoning that emphasize rules, rights, universality, and impartiality over ‘female’ ways of moral reasoning that emphasize relationships, responsibilities, particularity, and partiality.”

In the late-twentieth century, feminists Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings contributed an ethics of care as an extension to the traditional ethical framework. The ethics of care takes women’s experiences into account and considers human relationships in moral decision-making in addition to abstract principles. Gilligan believes that moral decision-making is not an objective process in which several universal and abstract principles can be equally applied in all situations. Therefore, the simple dichotomy between “good” and “bad” in human moral situations does not exist. Noddings further asserts that rationality and emotions are not separate realms and both should be accounted for in the moral decision-making process.

Feminists’ approaches to ethics have been further developed and applied in feminist research. In this regard, feminist standpoint theorists such as Dorothy Smith consider “research as praxis” and avow that the goal of feminist research is social transformation in order to gain social justice through an ethical gendered/intersectional lens based on care. Care, in this sense, involves a commitment to the development of another. In carrying out the ethics of care, standpoint feminist researchers give voice to their participants by including them in the design and process of their research projects; and the ownership of the data is understood as belonging to the participants as well. Key aspects of an ethics of care in feminist research include informed consent, keeping confidentiality, respecting human dignity and well-being of the participants, and participant review.

Poststructuralist, postcolonialist and postmodernist feminists have influenced ethical approaches to the process of knowledge creation by questioning who is the knower and under what circumstances. Bella Vivat, for example, declares that, “Ethical choices always occur within a situation involving particular relationship.” She promotes “feminist situated ethics”, which suggests that although a researcher’s goal may be women’s emancipation, her or his participants may not always share researchers’ desires for their emancipation, and one must respect that difference.

To conclude, although Western feminist ethics are rooted in the European Enlightenment ideas, feminists have enriched the ethical systems by contributing perspectives from women’s moral experiences. Even while the ethics of care has provided a platform for responsibilities to others in terms of emotions and reasons, the “ethical dilemma” of unequal power relationships still remains problematic. Therefore, development of ethical frameworks continue as an ongoing concern for feminists.

**Feminist Methods—Feminist Adaptations**

**Chantle Beeso**

Debates surrounding the existence and validity of feminist methods and methodologies are ongoing among scholars in feminist communities. While acknowledging a lack of consensus among feminist scholars, in this paper I put forward the position that there are no feminist methods; however, there are multiple feminist approaches to research methods. What unifies feminist research is the value placed on critically challenging dominant and/or traditional narratives of “truth” through gender and intersectional analyses and critiques of positivism.

Prominent feminist researchers Abigail Brooks and Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber define a “methodology” as a theory of how research should proceed, and a “method” as a technique for gathering evidence. In keeping with the definition of “method”, Sandra Harding asserts that there are only three general social research methods: listening to what people say, observing what they do, and historical research. The approaches to these three methods,
however, are plentiful, and feminist scholars have adapted their research practices to include frameworks for meeting feminist criteria, which are grounded in gender/intersectional analyses. As Shulamit Reinhartz argues, feminist scholars continue to use basic methods in new ways because “the knowledge they seek requires it.” Additionally, feminists have critiqued positivist approaches to research methods through calling attention to and problematizing inequalities in researcher-subject power dynamics.

As an interdisciplinary field, feminist research draws on a variety of methods, often using them in new ways driven by feminist values. Consciousness-raising, for example, has been cited as a feminist method by scholars such as Reinhartz and Catherine Mackinnon. The basic research methods that underpin consciousness-raising groups fall into the categories of listening to and observing research subjects, neither of which are new or necessarily feminist in nature. The approach used in these groups, however, is feminist in that participants are afforded more space to voice their opinions and they experience less of a power dynamic between the researcher and participants. Likewise, techniques such as ethnography, content analysis and surveys, while commonly used in feminist research, are not methods that emerged with feminism, rather they are constantly adapted to meet the larger feminist goal of social justice. Recent feminist research has expanded to include methodological adaptions to such techniques as dramatization, “theatre of the oppressed,” photography and multiple person narratives.

In accepting a situated approach to knowledge-building, many feminists have acknowledged reflexivity as a pivotal theme in feminist research methodologies, which requires researchers to “openly reflect on, acknowledge, and document their social location and the roles they play in co-creating data and in constructing knowledges.” In declaring her or his positionality, a feminist researcher is attempting to dismantle hierarchical structures that inevitably exist in research methods; and while completely eliminating power structures is not possible, the action of acknowledging positionality lends itself to the feminist methodology of challenging societal power dynamics. There may never be consensus on whether or not feminist research methods and methodologies exist. With that said, it is important to recognize the work feminist scholars are performing within research, and how their adaptive approaches challenge a historically patriarchal field of “knowing.” While feminists may use existing methods to conduct research, their varying approaches are unique to their respective projects of social justice, and these practices continue to evolve alongside the dynamics of feminist movements.

**Feminism—Transhumanism**

Rebekah Elkerton

The relationship between transhumanism and feminism may not be readily apparent. Transhumanism involves the transcending of humanity or the human body through technological “upgrades” to the individual and ultimately the species while feminism focuses on social justice. According to Nick Bostrom, co-founder of Humanity Plus, the transhumanist movement is based on the idea that human nature is improvable. By carrying out transhumanist technical advances, the hope is that there will be increased (trans)human life span, better physical and mental capacities, and greater individual control over emotions. Feminist critics of transhumanism question how and if these improvements can be regulated in ways that ensure positive contributions to society? Key concerns surround the issues of who will benefit from transhumanist technologies, and how “desirable” and “undesirable” traits will be decided when making upgrades.

I argue that feminism is based on the premise of attaining equity for individuals within society and this goal is not achievable within the transhumanist agenda. The limitations of transhumanism include a lack of attention to the complexities in issues of social justice, which leaves an opening for continued oppression of individuals and groups based on race, class, gender, sexuality, and (dis)ability, among other factors.

Transhumanist goals depend on access to technology and healthcare. Yet access to these resources worldwide is primarily based on wealth; therefore transhumanist enhancements cannot theoretically or practically be distributed equally to all people. Those in positions of power and privilege (i.e. the people who create, finance and regulate enhancement technologies) will ultimately act as gatekeepers who will determine the criteria for
“suitable” cross-cultural intellectual and physical traits and who will have access to the technologies. Initially, enhancement technologies, even if carefully regulated, will be exclusively available to a small portion of society. The introduction of any new successful technology first begins with its distribution amongst the world’s wealthy. If technological advancements to physical and intellectual capacities are distributed amongst this limited group of people, this will potentially create deeper divides between the “haves” and the “have-nots”. Fear of being persecuted for enhancements or lack there-of may cause social unrest or further discrimination against marginalized peoples, thereby reversing the anti-oppressive frameworks that feminists and other social activists have worked to achieve.

Cultural understandings of desired traits are another problematic matter in the transhumanist plan. The world is not made up of one homogenous group that agrees upon what qualities are most desirable within a person, a community or even a species. Traits that are deemed undesirable by one powerful group may be eventually eliminated as part of the transhuman body or posthuman existence; and those who do not hold the decision-making power may be silenced, further ostracized from society, or made obsolete. Indeed, the weeding of “undesirable traits” recalls the historical practice of eugenics, as carried out by oppressive governments, such as the Nazi regime.

The values and goals of transhumanism as it relates to women’s bodies are debated in feminist circles. Shulamith Firestone, for example, argues that women will not be liberated until they no longer have to incubate children. If Firestone’s claim is true, then technological advancements only benefit women and their bodies through alternative options to pregnancy and childbirth. However, transhumanist reproductive practices may also put women at risk of bodily regulation, sterilization, and discrimination based on carrying undesirable qualities. With much of the Western world already operating within a patriarchal system, how can feminists ensure that women’s rights will be maintained or continue to progress with the introduction of reproduction altering technologies?

The promise of transhumanism potentially has a dark side. The highly unequal distribution of wealth and power leaves much of the world’s population without access to current technologies and it is likely that this will be no different when it comes to implementing transhumanist advancements. While there may be advantages and liberation through some of the opportunities within technology, there is also an increased risk of discriminatory practices and divides within society. Looking forward, feminists will have to continue to weigh the benefits of new transhumanist technologies against the oppressive implications of transhumanist politics.

**Feminist (Dis)ability Study--Technological Enhancement**  
_Evelyn Boy-Mena_

The following essay seeks to briefly evaluate the transhumanist project by addressing concepts regarding (dis)ability from a feminist perspective. I take a decided stance in denouncing the claims made by transhumanist theorists and enhancement bioethicists that the elimination of disability through (bio)mechanical and genetic alterations will lead to a better society. In contrast to Ben Almassi’s (2010) work to reconcile bioethics and feminist disability studies, I side with Tom Koch’s arguments (2010) that transhumanist and bioethics theorists are pursuing misguided eugenic designs. Moreover, I stress that it is the responsibility of contemporary feminists to critically engage in this emerging discourse.

In his text, “Disability, Functional Diversity, and Trans/feminism,” Almassi attempts to bridge the divide between bioethicists and disability studies theorists by applying a critical feminist lens to debates concerning normal functioning and functional-diversity approaches to disability. His message is one of acceptance and celebration of all diverse modes of embodied functioning, including impairments and trans(post)humanist forms. Yet in so doing, Almassi evades discussing the larger transhuman project towards a super-human existence via technostandardization and consumerism. In short, instead of challenging systemic inequalities that arise from social ideologies that uncritically assume a reduced or contemptible quality of life stemming from (dis)abilities, Almassi advocates for the continuation of a utopian ideal of equity founded on Western consumer techno-culture.

An unchecked alliance between consumer techno-culture and transhumanist goals would
inevitably result in developing and standardizing the latest bio-enhancement or germ line therapy. Economic and other resource inequalities, including (bio)mechanical or genetic enhancement resources, would not put an end to suffering caused by discrimination against those with impairments; it would likely only intensify the socio-economic values placed on able-bodiedness and increase competition for those resources. Without questioning systemic inequalities of consumer culture that influence embodiment ideals, we allow the rich and powerful to define and achieve social ideals of embodiment, functioning, and performance while denying the marginalized and the poor the same rights of participation and access.

With its clear aim toward a super-human existence, the transhumanist goal raises important questions for feminist disability studies to address, including the following. Are all bodily enhancements valid or valuable? What values are coexistent with impairment? Should or can we regulate bodily enhancements in framing societal standards? What are the possible feminist responses to bioethicists, like Dr. Peter Singer, who advocate for non-consensual euthanasia of born “non-persons” with undesirable characteristics? Would an amorphous existence actually erase concepts of disability, gender or any other social marker of difference? If disability and other “undesired” differences, as defined by consumer techno-culture, are overcome in a posthumanist state, is the feminist commitment and struggle toward social justice and equality achieved?

The current generation of feminist academics has an unprecedented appreciation for the acceptance and recognition of the values of human diversity. Developments in technology have assisted in expanding the cultural richness of our communities by facilitating the participation of impaired persons in disabiling environments. Simultaneously, advances in consumer techno-culture also threaten diversity in all its forms. The quality and existence of our future as human beings is at stake. Therefore, it is necessary that contemporary feminists engage in debates concerning the status of (dis)ability, issues of personhood and euthanasia, and the opportunities and challenges in the potentiality of transforming into amorphous and/or posthuman beings.

**Social Justice—Nonhuman (Animals)**

**Maria Vicente**

Issues of the nonhuman are some of the most controversial developments in contemporary feminist studies. Rather than refusing to accept this area of academic investigation, feminist scholars need to acknowledge and consider the theoretical justifications for studying human/nonhuman relations. While this topic may not be for everyone — and surely, no topic ever is — social justice issues surrounding nonhuman animals are founded on theories and methodologies that stem from prominent and accepted feminist study. The basis for including nonhuman animals in feminist studies come from feminist attention to using intersectionality theory, challenging binary (gender) systems, and studying performativity.

A strong argument championing the inclusion of the nonhuman in feminist studies is founded on intersectionality theory. Alice Hovorka explains intersectionality as a “theory and methodology of studying the relationships amongst numerous dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations and outlining interdependencies between social categories of power.” While intersectionality has become common theoretical framework in feminist scholarship, many (eco)feminists, amongst other interdisciplinary feminist scholars, wish to broaden the categories within this methodology. Just as the original categories of race and gender included in intersectionality theory have expanded to include a myriad of other identity factors, (eco)feminists now wish to add nonhuman species to this list.

For some academics, focusing on issues of nonhuman animals is too much of a departure from common understandings of feminist theory and politics, which are grounded in women’s and gender issues. However, feminist discourse continually undergoes transitions as definitions are reconsidered and research moves in new directions. Feminist academics need to be open minded about what can and should be included under the umbrella of feminist scholarship. Why are we so keen to deny this shift towards the nonhuman and limit study to traditionally "acceptable" categories of feminist scholarship?

Maintaining a human/nonhuman divide reinforces a binary system based on patriarchal and heteronormative discourse. It forces us into an
anthropocentric point of view that encourages hierarchy and exclusion, comparable to the hegemonic gender binary. The desire to reconsider classifications that organize structures of culture and society is foundational to the (eco)feminists’ goal of breaking down the human/nonhuman divide. The distancing between human and nonhuman animals occurred when Western feminists attempted to disassociate women from nature. This attempt at disassociation actually created a closer bond between women and nonhuman animals because the process of exclusion established the foundation of a relationship between the two. These constructed binaries are now being challenged by (eco)feminists, often through unique and controversial means.

One of the ways human/nonhuman divisions and relations are being explored is through performativity. Just as one can perform gender, one can also perform species-related representation. A human/nonhuman fusion is prevalent in cultural representations from fashion to digital experiences. Human/nonhuman hybrids like cervids in gaming are an example of species performativity: individuals can take on the persona of a deer to explore a virtual place where binaries do not exist and the notions of culture and nature are singular. This acknowledgement of the “beast within” challenges linear narratives about both gender and species. As Vicki Kirby reminds us, there is no outside of nature, no originary humanicity.

Including the nonhuman in feminist studies is supported by strong theories and methodologies within feminist interdisciplinary research. The framework of intersectionality theory, the practice of challenging binaries, and attention to performativity all work together in exploring and perhaps dismantling the human/nonhuman divide. Feminist discussions and research in this matter not only impacts nonhuman animals, but also affects human interactions, gender systems, and identity politics. As the parameters within feminist studies continue to change and feminist academics begin to consider new issues, it is necessary to both embrace these controversial developments and take the emerging scholarship seriously. The important question is: Why do we think of feminism only in human terms? Including the nonhuman in feminist studies is not denying the political; the nonhuman — its definition and the issues involved with it — is political.

Notes
1. Meg Luxton, “Feminism and the Academy: Transforming Knowledge?” in Reconsidering Knowledge: Feminism and the Academy, edited by Meg Luxton and Mary Jane Mossman (Halifax: Fernwood, 2012), 24-41
2. Theoretical contributions include standpoint and intersectionality; innovative teaching and research practices highlight collaboration and reflexivity; key areas in the expansion of subject matter involve masculinities and disabilities studies; and graduate programs in Women’s and Gender Studies have been developed at Carleton, Queen’s, Western, York, UBC, and University of Ottawa, among others.
3. Luxton, 24. Luxton provides examples, such as the denouncement of women’s studies in the National Post (Jan. 2010) as “angry, evasive and dubious programs.”
7. Boddy and Gray, “Making Sense of the Waves,” 383. Sex positivity refers to a belief that sex can be a positive effect in someone’s life and reaffirms ideas of choice and diversity in sexual desires and experiences.
Television and New Media, Television and New Media 1, no. 53 (2000), 54.


10. Carisa R. Showden, "What's Political about the New Feminisms?" Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies 30, no. 2 (2009), 167. In this context, third-wave feminism is defined as the most current feminist activity (beginning in the late 1980s to the present).

11. Ibid., 181.


13. Ibid., 17.


15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 236. According to Michel Foucault, power flows through institutions and is exercised through language; therefore, power is diffuse and not ever equally distributed.

17. Ibid., 238.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 233.

20. Elizabeth R. Cole, "Coalitions as a Model for Intersectionality: From Practice to Theory," Sex Roles 59, no. 5-6 (2008), 446.


22. Ibid., 6.


24. Ibid., 9.


26. Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977, edited by C. Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), 78–108. Foucault also invented the technique of genealogy — a method that can be used for examining the development of present rules, institutions and practices that claim authority. Genealogy aims to discover marginalized discourses, which as a consequence have a vital creation of new epistemological spaces.


28. Marxists believe that power is possessed, for example, by capitalists. Foucault believes that power is powerful because it produces joy, (explained in Power.Knowledge, see note 26). Foucault also thinks that power is exercised in many different ways at micro-levels (e.g. in the classroom, between partners, within the family, on the street).


34. Non-Western ethics do not share this framework. From a mystical perspective, the whole world is a sign of God and all creatures are praying to God in their own ways. In other words, in this non-Western framework, cognition is achieved through intuition and deep self-scrutiny.
38. Preissle and Han, 584, 586.
39. Ibid., 586.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., 590.
42. Participatory Action Research is a good example of including participants to the research process.
43. Preissle and Han.
45. Preissle and Han. Situated ethics is different from the concept of situational ethics, which was developed in the context of Western Christianity. In situational ethics, if love is best served, sometimes other moral principles can be cast aside.
48. “Listening to what people say” can include analyzing research subjects’ written responses (content analysis); see Sandra Harding, “The Method Question,” in Hypatia 3, no. 2 (1987), 22.
50. Ibid.
51. Brooks and Hesse-Biber, “An Invitation to Feminist Research,” 6; and Doucet and Mauthner, 4. Positivism asserts that there is objective knowledge/truth and it is valued in scientific research and methods.
52. Ibid. Consciousness-raising groups emerged in the second-wave of Western feminism as a form of political activism. The groups offered a space for women to discuss women’s issues that were not being adequately addressed in mainstream research and politics. Forms of consciousness-raising groups continue to exist today.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
60. Koch, 687.
62. This paper focuses specifically on nonhuman animals, but other categories of the nonhuman, such as AI (artificial intelligence) and organic matter, are also important new areas in feminist research.
64. This notion of disgust is explored in Richard Twine, “Intersectional disgust?” Animals and (Eco)Feminism,” Feminism & Psychology 20, no. 3 (2010).

65. The philosopher Immanuel Kant argued for humanity’s superiority over nature. Patriarchal and heteronormative discourse distanced men from nature and instead associated nature with women.


References


