

Lecture & Discussion Notes: Sapiro, Chapter 1
"Women's Studies: An Introduction"

- 1. Representing women: the consequences of defining "human" as "male."**
 - a. Androcentrism - male experience is traditionally considered generic.
 - i. *Hamlet* as analogy - we expect titles/words to reflect reality - for everyone else to revolve around the title character.
 - b. Qualities considered "adult" and "human" = considered male, and inverse
 - i. Female experience is considered childlike/unimportant; as the writer Isak Dinesen famous said, "Women and children: is that one category, or two?"
 - c. Logically the equation "male = generic" doesn't work, because it can't be reversed - no one would accept "female = generic." Many inequalities in social traditions work the same way. For example, some people argue that it is not sexist for women to be renamed after their husbands when they marry. But the fact that very few men would accept the same arrangement suggests that changing one's name is not value-neutral.
 - d. The subject of women - and female experience - has historically been ignored, erased, distorted. Myths about women have helped keep women in subordinate positions that serve male needs. These positions - domestic worker, child-rearer, assistant - are not necessarily negative in themselves, but become negative when they are defined as "not work," are unpaid and unacknowledged, and are the only cultural options available.
 - i. Example: "working woman."
 - ii. Example: "women's role."
- 2. Women's Studies as a field of study**
 - a. WS an academic discipline beginning in late 1960s.
 - b. WS is the study of what male scholarship has ignored: the "meanings that events, ideas, and social institutions have for women as well as for men" (Sapiro 8) - how gender shapes experience and history.
 - c. On important aspect of WS scholars is their skepticism about "facts," "scholarship," and "evidence."
 - d. Feminism has helped shape WS.
 - e. Interdisciplinary.
 - f. Links scholarship to current events, social phenomena
 - g. Women's studies, women studies, or gender studies? A semantic debate with important consequences for enrollment and the general spread of information. Often, for example, one has to take a course in Women & History to find out about women in history. Furthermore, at Fisher, very few male students enroll in WGST courses.
- 3. Social Science Methods of Studying Women and Gender**
 - a. social sciences are multiple and differing in their methodologies

- b. however, all use empirical research, systematic observation to draw conclusions
- c. in this research, testing (rather than proving) hypotheses is central
 - i. specify research question in advance
 - ii. plan research strategy
 - (1) determine categories of actions to be studied
 - (2) define boundaries of categories
 - (3) **specify third factors**
 - (4) observe and analyze; be skeptical
- d. methodologies:
 - i. ethnography: studying some "portion of human life in context" (Sapiro 15). Visit natural setting; watch and learn; ask people how they understand their own lives.
 - ii. experiments: select a phenomenon and try to isolate it from other factors in order to explain it.
 - iii. survey research: create instrument, collect data, generalize
 - iv. depth interviewing: comparable to oral histories
 - v. institutional or event studies: Kanter (IBM), Hochschild (Delta)
 - vi. archival research: what have people written about X?
 - vii. content analysis: our look at media ads does this
 - viii. meta-analysis: review of literature on a topic
- e. Areas of debate about research methods: quantitative v. qualitative; many researchers use combination of methodologies; choice of method always involves trade-off.

4. **Understanding and Interpreting Women's Lives**

- a. are we studying difference between women and men, or studying the presence/value of women? Difference is not the same as inequality.
- b. criteria can be flawed; data can be construed many different ways
- c. what kinds of differences are interesting? Primarily differences that affect social power.