

Gender and Media:

Course, Website, and Research Report

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“If we do not know our own history,
we are doomed to live as though
it were our private fate.”
(Hannah Arendt)

Hannah Arendt’s quote does not only apply to German-Jewish cultural and political history, but also to the history of women’s liberation, feminism, and gender studies. The way feminism has been traditionally taught within the field of German Studies in North America has often been through the works of women writers, poets, and filmmakers. It is only in the last few years that scholars have begun to teach Feminist German Studies with a focus on contemporary gender and media discourses and developments in Germany and beyond.

In this article, I present a report on a course and a website I developed while working as a sessional instructor in the Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies at the University of Victoria in 2017. I begin with an overview of the course, the learning goals, web resources, and the outcomes.

Overview of the course

The course not only allowed students to engage with German feminist history, literature, film, and media, but also to produce a web project by the end of the term that engaged with a social justice theme or cause in the Germanic, Slavic, and European fields of study. I used open-sourced technology and collaborated with international scholars and researchers to design a useful resource that went way beyond the scope of one academic course, and continues to grow and expand with each new course I design and teach, and each new project that I undertake.

Learning goals

The course was designed to familiarize students with intersectional feminist analysis of primary and secondary sources, engaging them in critical discussions of gender and

media today. Specifically, students had to lead group discussions, present their ideas in academic writing (research essays focusing on topics of their choice) and in formal presentations. For their final projects, students had to research and develop a digital project (which made up 25% of the final grade) that entailed creating a blog or a website with at least 5 posts on a topic not covered in class, introducing new ideas, perspectives, angles, under-represented minorities, etc. and then present it in class.

Following the criteria for learning outcomes set up collaboratively by the faculty of the Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies at UVic, students developed their analytical skills, their understanding of culture, media, and technology, as well as an understanding of how technology influences global social and cultural practices. They learned to formulate relevant critical questions and to question the social constructions of culture and society, as well as media and identity. In the course of their research work for this course, students also developed critical media literacy, using intersectional feminist methodologies, and producing individual research project that not only presented their arguments in dialogue with scholarly work, but also included a social justice component. Finally, the students got to practice their public speaking skills and develop professional presentation skills.

Course materials and topics

The textbook for this course, Myra Marx Ferree's *Varieties of Feminism: German Gender Politics in Global Perspective* (2012) was highly effective in outlining both the historical perspective and contemporary feminist discourses in Germany. Starting with the history of feminist movements before WWI and concentrating on case studies that included Louise Otto-Peters, the first feminist German newspaper, ADF – German Women's Association (1869), August Bebel, Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg, BDF – Federation of Women's Organizations (1894), and Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science, students then learned how the early feminist movements were interrupted during the National Socialist era, and consequently split into West-German and East-German movements. Students were surprised to learn that the feminist movement had to be re-ignited and re-envisioned after WWII, and that there was no direct continuity between the historical feminist movements.

When discussing the West-German feminist movement, we focused on Hannah Arendt, Helke Sander, Sigrid Damm-Rüger and 1968 SDS tomato incident. We discussed Alice Schwarzer's pioneering work in the 1970s, as well as the fate of Afro-German women in Germany and the intersections of racism and sexism they experienced. In the East-German context, we discussed Katja M. Guenther's second chapter of *Making Their Place: Feminism after Socialism in Eastern Germany* (2010), which outlines how much more progressive women's rights and services were in the GRD, as well as the impact of German Reunification, presented in the documentary film *My Second Life: East German Women in a Changed World* (dir. Simone Shoemaker,

1996, 53min). We focused on the contrast between East and West gender policies, the rise of Angela Merkel, and the literary scandal around Christa Wolf's involvement with the STASI.

We then moved on to contemporary German feminism and media, looking closely at case studies such as pop-feminism, net-feminism, *Alphamädchen* (Alpha-Girls), Danielle de Picciotto and the Love Parade, #aufschrei, #ausnahmslos, *Missy Magazine*, Conchita Wurst, Reyhan Şahin (aka "Lady Bitch Ray"), and the hip hop artist Sookee.

We concluded the course with a guest lecture and discussion with the Berlin-based feminist activist and author Anne Wizorek, whom I was able to bring to UVic (and UBC) thanks to the Distinguished Women Scholars Lecture Award from the University of Victoria. Anne Wizorek's campus talk, entitled "#Radical Solidarity – Why Feminism Matters Now More Than Ever," was followed by a discussion panel on media and weaponized language with several fellow colleagues from German Studies and Gender Studies at UVic. This lecture led to an invitation from the Greater Victoria Public Library to design a lecture series on intersectional feminism to bridge the academic and non-academic communities. Simultaneously, I also organized a fundraiser to support the Canada Refugee Council in response to the wave of hate crimes towards immigrants and refugees in Canada and the U.S. The students from the Gender and Media course were able to participate in all these events and see the direct applications of the theoretical and historical themes of our course transcend the academic and the national media landscapes.

Website: Feminist German Studies

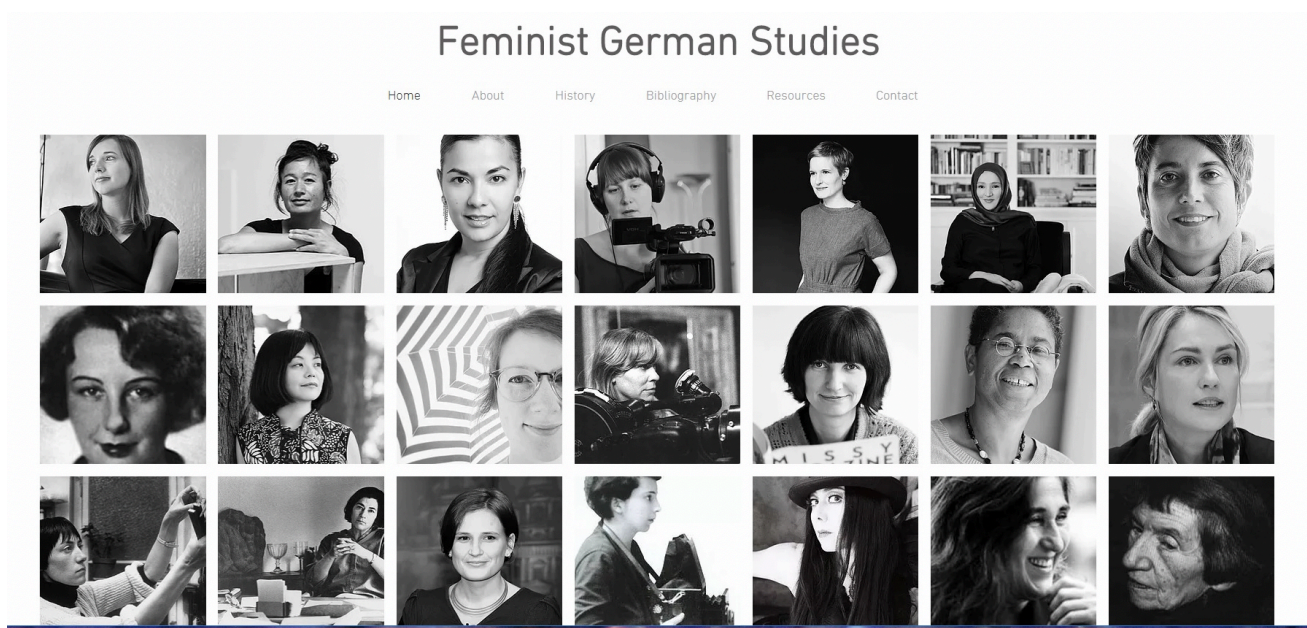


Figure 1: Screenshot of the Feminist German Studies homepage

While preparing for this course, I consulted with many German scholars, educators, and activists, and realized that a course like this did not exist yet. Traditionally, German Studies departments in North America incorporated gender analysis by way of courses on “German Women Writers,” but no available syllabi or course materials existed for a contemporary German Gender and Media course. I decided to build a website that would serve as an archive and resource site to would help me and others develop new courses with a focus on gender and media, and to facilitate a community not only for younger academics in need of syllabi and course materials, but students and other researchers interested in this field of study as well.

I built the Feminist German Studies website (<http://feministgerman.wixsite.com/home>) with the kind support of the Women in German (WIG) Professional Development Award – originally designed for sessional instructors for professional development and conference travel funding, and presented it at the 2016 Women in German annual conference in Banff.

Along with many pages of various resources, bibliographies, filmographies, and media, the website includes three historical timelines of German, Austrian, and Swiss history of feminist movements (previously unavailable online or in print). To compile these timelines, I collaborated with Anne Wizorek for the German timeline, Andrea Zaremba and Margit Hauser at STICHWORT: Archives of the Women’s & Lesbians’ Movement Library – Documentation – Multimedia Research Centre in Austria (<http://www.stichwort.or.at/english/frames-e/index-e.htm>), and Leena Schmitter, Kristina Schulz, and Sarah Kiani in Switzerland. They all kindly provided their research free of charge.

Outcomes

After my Gender and Media courses concluded, I added a “Student Projects” page to the site (<http://feministgerman.wixsite.com/home/for-students>), to showcase the very impressive and informative web projects that the students produced in my courses. I continue to maintain the website, adding new resources and links, as well as new student projects after each new course that includes a web project component. My hope is that this website will continue to grow and find more applications and usage amongst a new generation of German Studies scholars and teachers, and that it will inspire more interesting collaborative projects and tools.

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Katrina Sark received the CAUTG/DAAD Innovate German Award 2017 for the course "Gender and Media." We would like to congratulate her on this achievement. Herzlichen Glückwunsch, Katrina!