WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM

SPRING 1990
EVENING/HARBOUR CENTRE

SUE WENDELL
Lec. Tue. 18:30-20:20
Tut. Tue. 20:30-21:20

W.S. 302-3

WOMEN AND DISABILITY

Disability is a feminist issue. Most women will be disabled at some time in their lives. Fine and Asch (1988) estimate that 16% of women are disabled now. Disabled women struggle with both the oppressions of being women in male-dominated societies and the oppressions of being disabled in societies dominated by the able-bodied. They are bringing the knowledge and concerns of women with disabilities into feminism and feminist perspectives into the disability rights movement.

Disability is not a biological given; like gender, it is socially-constructed from biological reality. Some of the same attitudes about the body which contribute to women's oppression generally also contribute to the social and psychological disablement of people who have physical disabilities. In addition, feminists are grappling with issues that disabled people face in a different context: Whether to stress sameness or difference in relation to the dominant group and in relation to each other; whether to place great value on independence from the help of other people, as the dominant culture does, or to question a value-system which distrusts and de-values dependence on other people and vulnerability in general; whether to take full integration into male-dominated/able-bodied society as a goal, seeking equal power with men/able-bodied people in that society, whether to preserve some degree of separate culture, in which the abilities, knowledge and values of women/the disabled are specifically honoured and developed.

We will study these and other issues by focussing on the experiences of physically disabled women. Topics for lectures will include: Defining disability: stereotypes vs. reality. How disability is socially-constructed: issues of access. Cultural attitudes toward the body: quest for control and fear of imperfection. The "otherness" and "invisibility" of disabled people. The cognitive authority of medicine over our experiences of our bodies: how disabled people's knowledge is silenced. Cultures of disabled people. The education of disabled women. How disability and gender affect training and work. Disabled women's sexuality. Reproductive issues for disabled women; rights and access to reproductive choice and perspective on aborting potentially disabled fetuses. Mothers with physical disabilities. Women's experience of caring for disabled people, including mothering disabled children. Dependency/Independence. Friendships between disabled and able-bodied women.

(continued)
REQUIRED READING


The texts are anthologies of essays by and about women with disabilities. Additional articles and research resources will be made available by the instructor.

ASSIGNMENTS

25% Write and present to class one short (4 page) report on a book or a group of articles
60% Research/discussion paper (approx. 10 pages)
15% Reading and participation in class discussion

Prerequisites: 60 credit hours