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 the goal, seeking equal power with men/able-bodied people in that society, or whether to preserve some degree of separate culture, in which the abilities, knowledge and values of women/people with disabilities 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 people with disabilities. The cognitive authority of medicine over our experiences of our bodies: how disabled people's knowledge is silenced. Cultures of people with disabilities. The education of disabled women. How disability and gender affect training and work. Disabled women's sexuality. Reproductive issues for women with disabilities: rights and access to reproductive choice and perspectives on aborting potentially disabled fetuses. Mothers with physical disabilities. Women's experiences of caring for disabled people, including mothering disabled children. Dependency/Independence. Friendships between women with and without disabilities.
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.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students will be required to write one (4-page) take home-exam on the lectures and readings (25% of final mark); to write one research/discussion paper (approximately 10 pages, 60% of final mark); to introduce one topic for class discussion and participate in other class discussions (15% of final mark).

ASSIGNMENTS

15% Class discussion and class participation
60% Research/discussion paper
25% Take-home final

Prerequisite: 60 credit hours or W.S. 100