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. Women with disabilities struggle with both the problems of being women in male-dominated societies and the problems 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 toward the body which contribute to women's oppression generally also contribute to the social and psychological disablement of people who have disabilities. In addition, feminists are grappling with issues that people with disabilities 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 women with disabilities and of the women who care for them. 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. Violence against women 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 people with disabilities, including mothering disabled children. Dependency/Independence. Friendships between women with and without disabilities.
REQUIRED READING:


Additional articles and research resources will be made available by the instructor.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Mid Term Exam (4 page, take home) 30%
- One Research/Discussion Paper (15 pages) 60%
- Class Discussion Participation 10%