

Exhibiting Subjectivity: Feminist Pedagogy and Visual Culture

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Abstract (Summary)

My research comprises three case studies: a collaborative gallery exhibition organized around the theme of identity; a collective intervention at a Take Back the Night rally; and lastly, a group project building upon a well-known feminist artwork (The Dinner Party by Judy Chicago) created for the student union---each emerging from my own teaching in the context of an introductory women's studies class over the course of 3 years. Each case utilizes aspects of feminist pedagogy and feminist visual culture to contravene traditional making, seeing, and research methods.

Each chapter focuses on the issues of subjectivity and agency in at least two significant ways---First, I analyze my students struggles with the identities, especially of women, promoted in the visual culture we explored, as the extension of subject positions and identities were not easily available. Secondly, students were asked to use the materials and premises of the course to devise public projects in which those outside of the class would engage. As a way to understand how alternative subjectivities and agency are presented and made available in the imaginings of my students and through my own pedagogy I utilize the concept of mode of address.

Utilizing feminist pedagogical and visual cultural practices meant more than merely mimicking the styles, attitudes, or strategies of a particular artist, theory, or group---it required that students negotiate a set of cultural practices (artmaking) and a set of political practices (feminism) that mark the female subject in ways that are often uncomfortable, unfamiliar, contradictory to them. As such they offer strategies and practices for deconstructing oppressive power relations by revealing how they function, individually, culturally, and institutionally in the production of patriarchal forms of subjectivity.

My projects asks: What modes of subjectivity and agency are offered, challenged, investigated, and produced through simultaneous engagements with feminist pedagogy and feminist visual culture?

Using multiple methods, including feminist case studies, visual ethnography, and poststructural theories, I analyze students various projects for what they do with the materials and premises of the class. I maintain that the promise of this work is in that it may, through the experimentation advocated in my pedagogy and in the feminist visual culture we engage with, trouble and/or disrupt easy associations with predetermined subject positions making way for the expansion of possibilities to occur. The production of many of my students' projects allowed students to "play" with their identity and subject positions with different sorts of risk. This research project highlights the promises as well as the difficulties and risks involved in taking up such positions.

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