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Sample Learning Exercise
WS 101

Learning Exercise: Women's Studies, Curiosity and the Value of Asking Questions

See full exercise here: <http://trouble.room34.com/archives/3283>

Part One: What makes you curious about this image/object?

Take out a piece of paper. Spend about 2 minutes writing down as many questions as you can think of about this image. Don't worry about answering any of your questions, just focus on being curious and asking questions about this image that speak to that curiosity.

Part Two: Why aren't we curious? Feminism and the Importance of Curiosity

- a. We aren't curious because we are trained to receive and accept information instead of questioning it, challenging it or wondering about it.
- b. Those who don't want us to think critically about how systems and structures work and at whose expense benefit when we fail to be curious.
- c. Being curious and asking *lots* of questions enables us to pay attention to how things really work and how those things may serve to reinforce unjust power relations between people, communities, nations, institutions.

Part Three: What questions can we ask about this image/object?

- **Labor:** Does the making and selling of this sneaker lead to an unequal distribution of labor and profit—between worker/producer or between communities/regions/nations?
- **Marketing:** Do their methods work to reinforce harmful stereotypes about women? If so, how and which ones? Do sneaker advertisements ever objectify women?
- **Consumers:** Who has access to these sneakers?
- **Consumption:** What happens to this sneaker when we are done wearing it? Where do discarded sneakers go?
- **Workers:** Why are so many of the workers who make these sneakers women from Indonesia, Vietnam and China? What are their stories?
- **Bodies:** What kinds of bodies should/do wear this sneaker? Who shouldn't, or who can't, wear this sneaker?

Part Four: A Final Exercise

A feminist curiosity involves the desire to take women's lives, in all of their complexities, seriously and to expose and critically reflect on invisible and visible workings of power and privilege.

1. Pick a question (one of yours from step one or mine from step three).
2. Write down as many questions as you can think of about your chosen question.
3. Once you get to a question that makes you really curious, stop writing.
4. Do this exercise for a couple of minutes every day for a week.
5. Post a 200 word comment to the "a final exercise" entry with one set of your questions and your thoughts about the exercise.

see other side

POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATIONS: This exercise is designed for use in a wide range of classrooms.

In a **face-to-face classroom:**

- Serves as the introduction to a larger discussion about curiosity and some different ways that feminists are curious about the world.
- Students break up into groups after this exercise and discuss their various questions.
- As a group they report on one question (or line of questions) that they find particularly compelling to the whole class
- Collectively we discuss the various questions in relation to power/privilege/injustice

In a **hybrid classroom** (part online with some face-to-face time):

- Serves as the foundation for students' engagement with the lesson for that section.
- Students spend time on the exercise, clicking on the various links and reading the articles that are related to the exercise and topic of discussion.
- They post an entry on their own questions and comment on other students' post (at least 2).
- We have a face-to-face session in which we discuss the readings and our questions in relation to power/privilege/injustice

In an **online classroom:**

- Functions in many of the same ways as in the hybrid classroom.
- Students actively engage more with each other on the blog and through online discussions (of their questions and comments).
- Students might also be required to post their own links to images, blog sites, media examples that connect with their own questions.

Here are some other blog exercises/lectures I have recently used in my classes:

- A lecture with questions, posted online and delivered in class (on April 1, 2010)
<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/3004/2010/04/youth-values-and-good-and-bad-intentions.html>
- A question prompt for the week's online discussion (for the week of March 30-April 1)
<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/3004/2010/03/question-8-330-41.html>

Here are some of my recent course blogs:

- GWSS 3004: Contemporary Feminist Debates, Spring 2010
<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/3004/>
- GWSS 8190: Feminist and Queer Explorations in Troublemaking, Spring 2010
<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/8190>
- GWSS/GLBT 4403: Queering Theory, Fall 2009
<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/glbt4403/2009/09/why-blog.html>
- GWSS 3306: Popular Culture Women, Spring 2007
<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/gwss3306/>

Here is my online workshop about teaching with blogs and blogging while teaching:

<http://trouble.room34.com/archives/3253>