



# Companion Document to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education

## Women's and Gender Studies

*Approved by the ACRL Board of Directors, June 24, 2021*

### **Foreword**

*Work on this adaptation began in 2013, informed by the draft work of the ACRL Information Literacy revision task force, as a task of the ACRL WGSS Instruction Committee. Working mainly via online conferencing, the group wrote each Frame's definition, then the actions and attitudes for each Frame. Committee members presented drafts of the document as posters at the NWSA 2016 and ALA 2017 conferences to seek feedback from faculty and librarians. Further feedback was sought from the WGSS listserv, We Here listserv, and the WGSS Executive Committee. The final document was submitted in January 2021.*

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## **Introduction**

*In 2015, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) completed the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. Recognizing that diverse academic disciplines engage with information differently, the ACRL Women and Gender Studies Instruction Committee used the feminist lens of intersectionality to critically examine and adapt each of the original information literacy Frames to better address the needs and concerns of women’s and gender studies (WGS). A key theoretical approach applied in this document is critical information literacy. As defined by James Elmborg, critical information literacy builds on traditional definitions of information literacy, challenging students to “take control of their lives and their own learning to become active agents, asking and answering questions that matter to them and to the world around them” .<sup>1</sup>*

*Drawing on key texts from WGS and critical information literacy, the WGSS Guidelines for Women’s and Gender Studies Information Literacy incorporates WGS threshold concepts into the Information Literacy (IL) Framework and provides an intersectional feminist context for each Frame. This document is intended to support faculty and librarians who seek to integrate critical information literacy into their curriculum. Learning outcomes that accompany each Frame reflect a feminist pedagogical viewpoint.*

*As with library and information science (LIS), women’s and gender studies has its own discipline-specific vocabulary. To ensure the relevance of the Guidelines for Women’s and Gender Studies Information Literacy to women’s and gender studies, WGS vocabulary is used throughout and library terminology is limited. For example, when developing learning outcomes to accompany each Frame, the committee chose to limit library terminology by using the terms “actions” and “attitudes” instead of “knowledge practices” and “dispositions.” For readers unfamiliar with WGS terminology, we recommend consulting [Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies](#), an open textbook used to develop this document.*

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<sup>1</sup> James Elmborg, “Critical Information Literacy: Implications for Instructional Practice” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 32, no. 2 (March 2006): 193.

## **Disciplinary Alignment**

WGS does not share a common set of disciplinary standards or learning outcomes. In order to solidify disciplinary connections, committee members consulted introductory texts within the field, most notably *Threshold Concepts in Women's and Gender Studies*.<sup>2</sup>

While the statements below refer to “a student in the WGS classroom...”, this document intends to address information literacy through the lens of sexuality and gender broadly across disciplines.

## **WGSS Frames and Actions/Attitudes**

### *Assessment Strategies*

Given the inherently subjective and deeply personal approaches to creating, locating, and disseminating WGS scholarship, the Action/Attitudes do not prescribe fixed or measurable outcomes for evaluating instruction. However, these Action/Attitudes can serve as touchpoints for assessing specific learning goals.

## **Research as Inquiry**

In the context of women's and gender studies, instructors often facilitate a participatory and cooperative environment in the classroom, which empowers students to raise critical questions about structural inequities, gender roles, and norms. Students relate their own experiences to diverse sources of knowledge, leading them to question assumptions about gender and sexuality.

A student in the WGS classroom....

- **Actions and Attitudes:**
  - Considers the lack of women's voices in scholarly and other sources, such as primary sources, literary works, datasets, and the role of intersectionality in these gaps.
  - Identifies alternate sources or ways of reading sources against the grain.
  - Understands that relevant information may exist, but may be hard to find because of subject heading and keyword search limitations, such as dated or biased terminology in library systems or changing terminology within WGS.
  - Reviews information sources thoughtfully to identify potential biases, gaps, silences, and underlying assumptions about intersectional gender roles.
  - Feels empowered to investigate difficult critical questions about intersectional structural inequities often obscured in information.
  - Incorporates diverse information sources with individual experiences to create personalized knowledge.

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<sup>2</sup> Christie Launius and Holly Hassel, *Threshold Concepts in Women's and Gender Studies* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014).

- Delves into a question knowing each answer raises more questions, and follows those leads via feminist thinking to deeper discovery.

### **Information has Value**

The production and distribution of information sources are increasingly controlled by for-profit ventures and may marginalize underrepresented voices, including, but not limited to, BIPOC women, white women, and LGBTQIA people. WGS scholars value representation of these voices within and beyond traditional scholarly publishing, and use and create sources produced in traditions and formats that document lived experience (e.g. oral histories, memoirs, autoethnography, zines, etc.).

A student in the WGS classroom....

- **Actions and Attitudes:**
  - Understands that it may be difficult or unlikely to find these voices in certain circumstances or types of sources, along with the reasons why it might be difficult or unlikely.
  - Is aware that capital and profit are heavily involved in the production and dissemination of information, including scholarly information.
  - Recognizes patriarchy and related ideologies such as racism and ableism in popular and academic information creation and consumption.
  - Thinks critically about one's online presence, and the racialized and gendered effects of sharing one's work and self online.
  - Recognizes that the WGS threshold concept of privilege and oppression infuses information at every level: creating, collecting, indexing, finding, understanding, evaluating, and publishing.
  - Understands that WGS knowledge can be trans-, inter-, and multidisciplinary which may influence the way information is produced, disseminated, and accessed.

### **Authority Is Constructed and Contextual**

WGS understands that the academic community and academic publishing is built on a patriarchal construction of power and voice that privileges what Audre Lorde calls a "mythical norm".<sup>3</sup> Scholarly authority privileges these very specific kinds of knowing, and academic systems marginalize voices on the periphery. People who have been denied entry into, or who don't attain permanent positions in, academia ultimately fall out of the scholarly conversation. Students can also be perceived as marginal in this space.

When considering the authority of an information source, WGS scholars actively consider authors of non-dominant ideology, race, class, gender, and ability in their evaluation process and recognize that personal experience can be a critical source of knowledge.

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<sup>3</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: The Crossing Press, 1984), 116.

A student in the WGS classroom....

- **Actions and Attitudes:**
  - Seeks marginalized voices in respectful ways; acknowledges, sheds light on, gives voice to, and holds a space for those voices and the platforms where they can be discovered.
  - Inquires about the social, political, and cultural context in which information is produced and disseminated in order to facilitate critical analysis of information sources.
  - Understands that the formal structures of academic scholarship privilege particular types of knowledge production and dissemination which do not necessarily reflect the experiences and norms of marginalized groups.
  - Constructs authority with a thorough understanding of context, and questions traditional forms of authority.

### **Scholarship as Conversation**

Established power and authority structures influence the organization of information and privilege certain voices in scholarly conversations. WGS seeks to subvert these established power and authority structures, and broaden the conversation by bringing diverse voices from the margins to the center. WGS also provides alternative information structures and counter stories to offer alternative perspectives on scholarship.

A student in the WGS classroom....

- **Actions and Attitudes**
  - Identifies themselves in the subject of inquiry and acknowledges their own standpoint. Articulates and questions personal assumptions to facilitate openness to exploring and generating new knowledge.
  - Actively listens to the conversation through research and reading.
  - Creates new meaning by engaging across multiple perspectives.
  - Values equitable, inclusive, and feminist collaboration, sharing, and participatory research as a means of empowering self and others.
  - Articulates sound arguments supported with research grounded in feminist theories to build on previous work in WGS.

### **Searching as Exploration**

The searcher's cognitive, affective, and social dimensions are embedded within racialized, patriarchal, and inequitable economic structures, which influence how a searcher thinks about research and engages in search. Additionally, search terms are limited by what we already know, as Safiya Noble has observed,<sup>4</sup> and information systems and structures, like the people that created them, evidence gender and racial bias. The content included and not included in

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<sup>4</sup> Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

databases, as well as words used in subject headings and item records, are structured by social norms that replicate oppressions.

A student in the WGS classroom....

- Actions and Attitudes
  - Identifies avenues for seeking out the scholarship of underrepresented or marginalized communities, and knows where to gather such "hidden" information.
  - Understands that information systems, algorithms, and technological infrastructures are not neutral and are built by humans to display, order, and provide information in specific ways. Appreciates the ways in which these systems are specifically biased around gender.
  - Understands that relevant information may exist, but may be hard to find due to limitations in both the search process and information systems and structures.
  - Identifies the intersection of racialized and patriarchal power structures and related socioeconomic factors that magnify barriers to information access.
  - Tolerates ambiguity or even conflicting evidence as part of the research process.

### Information Creation as Process

WGS understands that patriarchal power structures privilege traditional, colonizing epistemologies, and create canons<sup>5</sup> that determine how information is created and disseminated. The continued reproduction of canonical knowledge produces arbiters of value in academia that prize Western-based cultural systems above all others, and feminist pedagogy in LIS questions the underlying processes that reify and sustain these systems. The pre- or post-publication editing and reviewing activities have historically dictated the value of scholarship, but WGS encourages the ongoing critique of these processes and our own professional adherence to them.

Sara Ahmed notes that citational practices are significant in the creation of disciplines: by selecting *who* and *who is not* cited, along with dictating what ideas are/are not core to a field of study, we are complicit in raising certain voices while erasing others.<sup>6</sup>

A student in the WGS classroom....

- Actions and Attitudes:
  - Articulates the capabilities and constraints of information developed through a hegemonic cultural lens that privileges certain voices over others.

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<sup>5</sup> Toni Morrison, *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature* Tanner Lectures on Human Values: University of Michigan, October 7, 1988, <https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/documents/a-to-z/m/morrison90.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Sara Ahmed, "Making Feminist Points," *Feministkilljoys*, 2013. <http://feministkilljoys.com/2013/09/11/making-feminist-points/>

- Understands that formal structures of academic scholarship have not made space for marginalized epistemologies in the information landscape.
- Critiques systems that confer value on different types of information products.