

**Feminist Theories
Graduate Seminar
WMST 510/AMST 530
Fall 2009
Professor Amy L. Brandzel**

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Course Description:

Feminist theory, at its best, interrogates the relationships between identity, knowledge and power through the discourses of race, class, gender, sexuality and nation. This means that feminist theory necessarily overlaps, if not infringes upon, other critical bodies of theory, such as queer theory, critical race theory, and postcolonial theory. This course attempts to navigate these intersections (or collisions) by focusing our discussion around four hotly contested debates, namely the politics (or “crisis”) of representation, the relationship between theory and praxis, the subversive potential of identities, and the project of “inclusion.” The four central questions posed in the course will be as follows: In what ways does feminist theory produce and limit subjects and objects of analysis? Is ethical representation, particularly of the disenfranchised and the subaltern, possible? How might we disrupt or subvert the process of subjectification and/or normative identities? And, lastly, how can feminist theory address the critiques of its exclusions without deploying a limited understanding of the project of “inclusion” that mirrors the ethos of universal citizenship?

Course Materials:

- Articles on ERES
- Estelle Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*
- Denise Riley, *Am I That Name?: Feminism and the Category of Women in History*
- Trihn T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*
- Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind*
- Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*
- M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*

Course Requirements:

Attendance, Participation and Facilitation	20% of Final Grade
Weekly Reading Responses	Incl. in Attendance/Participation
Anthology Review	20% of Final Grade
Book Review	20% of Final Grade
Final Project	40% of Final Grade

I. Attendance, Participation and Facilitation

Students are expected to come to class prepared, and actively participate (which involves talking as well as listening) in each class meeting.

Each student will facilitate class discussions at least twice during the semester, either alone or with a colleague depending on class size. Facilitators should use the weekly reading responses from WebCT in order to construct a facilitation plan that enables us to clarify the main arguments and central interventions, as well as investigate the critical questions raised by the assigned readings. Your facilitation plan could include discussion questions for large or small groups and/or outside materials such as short videos, applicable case studies or current events that would help us delve deeper into the readings.

II. Weekly Reading Responses

Each week that reading is due, students are required to post on the course WebCT page a reading response paper (approximately 750 words) that includes:

- A brief summary of the article or book (one paragraph per article; two paragraphs per book) that includes thesis/central argument, main (supportive) arguments, methodology, sources, and intervention(s) into applicable bodies of study.
- A discussion of two or three aspects of the reading that you find most interesting and generative. In your discussion, consider why this aspect is important, what it has brought to the text and to the issues of the course, how it might be applicable to other areas/issues/etc, and, if this is a criticism, how exactly you would rectify this “error” and what your solution would have added to the text. As we move further into the course, I also would like to see your analysis include comparative analyses of past readings.
- Two suggested discussion questions for the facilitators to use if they would like.
- Response papers must be *posted by 11pm Monday prior to the class session.*

III. Anthology Review

For this assignment you will write an argumentative essay (5-7 pgs) that will provide a sustained argument regarding your analysis of one of the anthologies on feminist theory and/or Women’s Studies (I will provide a list of possible anthologies). Your review will be due Week 4 and more information will be forthcoming.

IV. Book Review

For this assignment you will do a book review of a book of your choosing that is applicable to the course and approved by me (consider your final project as a guide for your possible selection). Your book review must be modeled on book reviews found in a current journal that is appropriate to the course and your area of study. Please send me your suggested books and the model journals over email by Week 6. Your book review will be due no later than Week 13.

V. Final Project

Your final project for this course can consist of a research paper or an annotated bibliography, depending upon your needs. Please plan to meet with me as early as possible in the semester to discuss possible topics that are useful to your own research agenda and directly applicable to the key debates raised in the course. You will provide a short presentation on your topic in the final weeks of the course, and your paper will be due during Finals Week.

Academic Integrity

Ethics and honesty are critical to academic and life success. You are expected at all times to follow university policies concerning academic integrity. Each student is expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty and integrity in academic and professional matters. The university reserves the right to take disciplinary action including dismissal against any student who is found responsible for academic dishonesty or who otherwise fails to meet the standards. Any student who has been judged to have engaged in academic dishonesty in course work may receive a reduced or failing grade for the work in question and for the course.

Special Accommodations

If you have or believe you have a disability, you may wish to self-identify. You can do so by providing documentation to the office for Services for Students with disabilities. Appropriate accommodations may then be provided for you. Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent full demonstration of academic ability should contact us personally as soon as possible so that we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and to facilitate your educational opportunities.

Schedule

Part I: Objects and Subjects of Feminist Theorizing

Week 1 (8/27): Introductions

Syllabus review

Week 2 (9/3): The Project of “Feminism”

Freedman, Estelle. *No Turning Back*

Week 3 (9/10): The Subject(s) of Feminist Theory

Lanser, Susan. “Feminist Criticism, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper,’ and the Politics of Color.” *Feminist Studies* 15.3 (Fall 1989): 415-441.

Alarcón, Norma. “The Theoretical Subject of *This Bridge Called My Back*.” In *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson, 288-299. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Riley, Denise. *Am I That Name?* (first half)

Week 4 (9/17): The Object(s) of Feminist Theory

Mohanty, Chandra. “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse.” In *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation & Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. McClintock, Mufti and Shohat, 255-277. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Lee, Rachel. “Notes from the (Non)Field: Teaching and Theorizing Women of Color.” In *Women’s Studies On Its Own*, ed. Robyn Wiegman, 82-105. Durham: Duke UP, 2002.

Riley, Denise. *Am I That Name?* (second half)

II. Interrogating Feminist Theories and Practices

Week 5 (9/24): Race for Theory

Christian, Barbara. “Race for Theory.” In *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Padmini Mongia, 148-157. New York: Arnold Press, 1996.

McDowell, Deborah. “Transferences: Black Feminist Discourse: The ‘Practice’ of ‘Theory.’” In *Feminism Beside Itself*, eds. Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman, 95-118. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Wiegman, Robyn. “Feminism’s Broken English.” In *Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena*, eds. Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb, 75-94. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.

Week 6 (10/1): Theorizing Identity As/And Difference

Trinh, T. Minh-ha. *Woman, Native, Other*

Week 7 (10/8): The Crisis of Representation

Chow, Rey. “Where Have All the Natives Gone.” In *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Padmini Mongia, 122-147. New York: Arnold Press, 1996.

Spivak, Gayatri. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271-313. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

III: Theorizing Identity and Subversion

Week 8: Fall Break = No Class (but there is reading due)

Wittig, Monique. *The Straight Mind*

Week 9 (10/22): Language and Subjectification & Gender, Identity, Subversion

Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender* (first half)

&

Discussion of Wittig as well as very preliminary discussion of Butler

Week 10 (10/29): Gender, Identity, Subversion

Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender* (second half)

Weeks 11 (11/5) & 12 (11/12): No Class

No Readings Due

Week 13 (11/19): The Transnationality of Sexual Politics

Alexander, M. Jacqui. *Pedagogies of Crossing*

Week 14: "Thanksgiving" = No Class

Weeks 15, 16 and Finals Week = Presentations

You, you and you.