

University of Massachusetts- Boston
Department of Women's Studies
WOST 400: Feminist Thought
Spring 2009
T/Th 9:30-10:45 am
W-1-51

Instructor: Chris Bobel, Ph.D, Associate Professor and Department Chair
Office: W-5-009
Phone: 617.287.6781 (with private voice mail—not checked every day)
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 11:00-12:00 and by appointment
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****A NOTE RE: EMAIL: While I will always do my best to respond to your email as swiftly as possible, I do reserve the right to set some limits. Thus, while I may respond to your email at any time, I will not *guarantee* a response before 24 hours after the receipt of your message and only during the work week between the hours of 9 AM and 5 PM. Please plan accordingly.

Course Description: This course exposes you to the range of feminist theories most prevalent during the 20th century up to present. First, we will examine several different but related theories by reading summary and comparative material and then deepen our understanding by reading selected pieces written in that particular theoretical tradition (sometimes as excerpts of longer pieces). Second, we will shift our attention to a growing category of feminist theory—theories of the body—while paying particular attention to the ways this body of theory deploys, challenges and elaborates concepts we've encountered thus far. Third and finally, we will land in the newest development of feminist theorizing—third wave feminism—and pay keen attention to the future of feminist thinking and its implications for practice.

***NOTE: This course is reading-intensive, intellectually-demanding course. It is designed for ADVANCED WOST major and minors. I will hold all students to very high standards.

Course Goals: This course is overly ambitious, admittedly. But we will have succeeded if you at least achieve the following:

- 1) grow acquainted with the key concepts embedded in the world of feminist theoretical discourse and the major theories they constitute (so when you are reading a piece of writing or listening to a speech, for instance, you have a clear idea of the theory/ies being invoked.
- 2) develop the confidence to critique the concepts and the theories, build on and apply them as needed.

Required Reading

- Lorber, Judith. (2005). *Gender inequality: Feminist theories and politics*, 3rd Ed. London and NY Roxbury Publishing Company. ISBN 1-931719-52-7
- Mohanty, C. (2003). *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham & London: Duke. ISBN 0-8223-3021-0
- Price, Janet and Shildrick, Margrit (1999). *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*. Routledge ISBN 0-415-92566-5
- Gillis, Stacy, Howie, Gillian, and Munford, Rebecca (Eds)(2007). *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, 2nd Ed . Palgrave MacMillan ISBN 978-0-230-53174-2
- Selections available on UMB's eReserves. Go to <http://docutek.lib.umb.edu/eres/default.aspx>. Our password is *feminist*

Student Assessments

Class preparedness, attentiveness and engagement: 15%

In this class, it IS required that you participate in class discussions and furthermore, it is expected that your participation will be intelligent, informed, thoughtful and responsive. That is, I expect you to come to class with all assigned reading completed and your comments will reflect this preparation. Obviously more than a few absences will impact your performance in this area. Throughout the term, I will assess the quality of your classroom contribution and at the end of the term, I will invite you to provide your own written assessment of your preparedness, attentiveness and engagement. I will consult your assessment when I assign you a grade on a 15 point scale. At any time during the term, you are welcome to check in with me regarding how your participation grade is shaping up. Just ask.

Abstracts: 20%

Every week you will prepare an abstract of one or two paragraphs summarizing the central ideas of *one* article of your choice. Each "abstract paper" should be no more than *one single-spaced* page. The abstracts are due on the day the particular readings are discussed. I will assess this brief but important assignment using the $\sqrt{+}$ (very good) $\sqrt{}$ (meets minimum standards) and $\sqrt{-}$ (does not satisfy assignment) system. Please keep all of your abstracts and keep them in chronological order (by my count, there will be a total of 20). I will ask you to turn in the full set on MAY 7th at which time I will assign a grade to the full set.

*** If you are not sure what a scholarly abstract looks like, find an academic journal (such as *Gender & Society*, *Meridians*, *National Women's Studies Association Journal* or *Signs* and read the abstracts that precede the journal articles.

Summary of Class Discussion-10%

At the start of the term, I will circulate a sign up sheet and each student will select one or two class periods (depending on the size of the class). On the day or days you select, you will be responsible for writing a summary of the class discussion that plainly states the key points made. The point of this exercise is to capture the material that you, as students, must “take away” from the class discussions. You will send me your summary, I will make any necessary corrections of fact, and then I will distribute it to the entire class. **YOUR SUMMARY IS DUE WITHIN 48 HOURS OF THE CLASS SESSION.** (if you take good notes during class, then this quick turnaround should not be a problem). As you can see, through this assignment, you and your classmates will collaboratively produce a study guide that, I hope, will ease the burden of preparing for your exam.

**NOTE: this study guide will NOT be exhaustive; you will still need to master (mistress?) the content of each assigned reading. This study guide will address the content of CLASS DISCUSSIONS only, but that is no small thing!

Exam: 30%

This take home exam will assess your comprehension of the material we will cover PART II: CRASH COURSE IN FEMINIST THEORIES (Jan 29-April 14). This will be a take home exam with a swift turnaround. I will hand out the questions on April 14th and you will turn in your completed exam AT THE START OF CLASS on April 16th. **PLAN AHEAD!** Format: I will give you a choice of questions to answer. The exam will consist of one short (approx. 2 pages) and one longer essay (approx. 4 pages). Exams will be typed and spell checked, but the focus of my assessment will be **CONTENT** not **STYLE**

Exam Distributed: April 14

Exam Due: April 16

Fem Theory for Dummies: 25%

This project can take the form of a zine, a spreadsheet, a visual timeline, a photographic essay, or any other innovative medium you can conjure that effectively represents a particular feminist theory (including theories of the body and third wave feminist theory). The objective is not to really “dumb down” feminist theory, but rather, makes it accessible, less scary, and less “baroque” so that people--all kinds of people--can see the beauty in feminist theory--for everyone. Whatever medium you select, you must do the following:

1) Distill the key concepts out of your selected body of theory. Explain both its analysis of gender oppression and its prescription for change. Now, tell (or show) what is distinctive about this work. What are its key contributions? That is, what does it

contribute to the enterprise of feminist theory in general? Does it correct, update, or complicate particular theories? If so, which ones and how so?

2) Identify key theorists and key writings associated with this particular sub category of feminist theory.

3) Point out flaws/omissions/problems with this body of theory.

I will assess your project based on your ability to comprehend the reading, extract the most salient aspects of this material and assess it in the context of the larger universe of feminist theory.

This is a chance for you to show me you've captured the key concepts associated with your selected theory well enough that you can communicate them succinctly (and with flair) to an audience of the unindoctrinated. Your creativity will be rewarded but ultimately, I am looking for your grasp of the material, so keep your eye on THAT ball and don't get too carried away with your collection of colored Sharpies.

Due: May 19th.

***NOTE: All written work must be:

- turned in on time. Late work will not be accepted. Be forewarned. Don't assume I will make an exception for you, no matter how much I like you.
- typed, spell checked, and page numbered
- double spaced with 1" margins and 12 pt font
- properly referenced (APA or MLA are preferred).

*** when and where possible, print on both sides of the paper to save resources

Course Policies

Attendance & Classroom Participation:

Because this course is discussion-intensive, your ON TIME attendance and participation is essential. The latter constitutes a small portion of your grade as discussed above..

Students will be expected to attend each class and keep up with the reading assignments so they've got something learned to say. I recognize that a number of factors make it difficult for students to speak up in class. But, for most of us, removing common obstacles makes a big difference. And we are all familiar with common obstacles to productive classroom dialogue: 1) coming to class unprepared and 2) fear of sounding stupid or being attacked for having an unpopular opinion. But, both obstacles are avoidable: the former if each student keeps up with the reading, the latter if we collectively agree to a few ground rules for democratic discussion.

The rules are as follows:

- no attacks based on individual or group characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, age or English language skills

- no esoteric terms or reference to materials unless they are known to all (or the speaker is equipped to define/explain their relevance).

Disability Accommodations:

Section 504 and the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 offer guidelines for curriculum modifications and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. If you have a disability and require appropriate accommodations, please notify me by the end of Add/Drop and get the proper documentation from the Ross Center for Disability Services in Room 2010 in the UMB Campus Center.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty:

I take plagiarism very seriously. Most students cheat because they doubt themselves and/or run out of time to complete assignments. They think I won't notice that they lifted a passage here or there. I do notice. And I do take action when I discover plagiarism. If you are panicking about meeting a deadline or you don't fully understand the course material, see me. Don't go online and try to cut corners. Really. I mean it. See me before you do something really dumb.

Below is the University Policy on Academic Standards and Cheating from UMB Undergraduate University Catalog. For further details, refer to the section on plagiarism.

"The first obligation of students is to pursue conscientiously the academic objective which they have determined for themselves. Students are expected to conform to all regulations of the University, of the College in which they are enrolled, and of the classes in which they are registered. It is further expected that all examinations, texts, written papers or other assignments completed as a part of academic programs are the product of the student's own work and effort.

This means that students may not solicit or use unauthorized material or assistance for their own benefit and may not offer or give such assistance to another student. Every written report or similar class assignment must indicate fully the sources from which the information used is obtained, and any verbatim quotations or paraphrases must be clearly indicated as such and properly credited to the source from which they were extracted or adapted."

Policy on Incompletes (per UMB's Office of Undergraduate Education):

The Incomplete (INC) grade may be given by the instructor only when a small portion of the required class work or the final examination has not been completed because of serious illness or extreme personal circumstances. **If the student's record is such that s/he would fail the course regardless of other missing work, s/he fails; an Incomplete is not appropriate in these circumstances.** Any student who receives an Incomplete grade may have a time limit as

stipulated within the contract to make up unfinished work **to a maximum of one year.** The triplicate Incomplete Contract Form must be completed and signed by both the instructor and student, who each get a copy along with the Department Chair. These forms can be obtained from the appropriate Departmental Offices.

(Tentative) Course Schedule

January 27

Introductions, Course Overview, the-usual-first-day-stuff

January 29

PART II: CRASH COURSE IN FEMINIST THEORIES

GENDER REFORM FEMINISMS:
LIBERAL FEMINIST THEORY

Reading due: Lorber pp. ix-44

AND

From *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) by Betty Friedan (go to: <http://www.h-net.org/~hst203/documents/friedan1.html>)

AND

Introduction to *The Second Sex* by Simone deBeauvoir (go to: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/introduction.htm>)

February 3

MARXIST AND SOCIALIST FEMINIST THEORY

Reading due: Lorber 45-85

AND

From *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) by Frederick Engels (eReserve)

February 5

“The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism & Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union (1981) by Heidi Hartmann (eReserve)

AND

“Capitalism, Imperialism, and Patriarchy: The Dilemma of Third-World Women Workers in Multinational Factories” by Linda Y. C. Lim (eReserve)

February 10

POST COLONIAL FEMINIST THEORY

Reading due: Lorber, 86-112

February 12

Feminism without Borders (2003) by Chandra Mohanty: Intro & Part I

February 17

Mohanty: Part II

February 19

*GENDER RESISTANCE FEMINISMS:
RADICAL FEMINIST THEORY*

Reading due: Lorber, pp.113-142

AND

SCUM Manifesto by Valerie Solanis (1967) (go to: <http://gos.sbc.edu/s/solanas.html>)

AND

Sexual Politics by Kate Millet (1969) (go to: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/millett.htm>)

February 24

From *In A Different Voice* (1982) by Carol Gilligan (eReserve)

February 26

“An Argument for Black Women’s Liberation as a Revolutionary Force” by Mary Ann Weathers (1969) (go to: <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/fun-games2/argument.html>)

AND

“Redstockings Manifesto” (1969) (go to: www.ux1.eiu.edu/~cfib/courses/Redstockings.pdf)

March 3

LESBIAN FEMINIST THEORY

Reading due: Lorber, pp.143-160

“Separating Lesbian Theory from Feminist Theory” by Cheshire Calhoun (1994)
(eReserve)

March 5

“Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference” by Audre Lorde (1984)
(eReserve)

AND

“Compulsory Heterosexuality & Lesbian Existence” by Adrienne Rich (1980) (eReserve)

March 10

PSYCHOANALYTIC FEMINIST THEORY

Reading due: Lorber pp. 161-175

AND

“Psychoanalysis and Feminism at the Millennium” by Juliet Mitchell

March 12

STANDPOINT FEMINIST THEORY

Reading due: Lorber, pp. 176-198

AND

“The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a NonWestern Feminist” by
Uma Narayan (1989) (eReserve)

AND

“Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist
Thought” by Patricia Hill Collins (1991) (eReserve)

March 17 & March 19

UMB Spring Break—NO CLASSES

March 24

TBA

March 26

TBA

March 31

GENDER REBELLION FEMINISMS:
MULTIRACIAL FEMINIST THEORY

Reading due: Lorber pp. 199-217

AND

“La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness” by Gloria Anzaldúa(1987) (eReserve)

AND

“Womanist” by Alice Walker (1983) (eReserve) [listed under Kramare]

April 2

Chapter from *Grassroots Warriors: Activist Mothering, Community Work and the War on Poverty* by Nancy Naples (1998) (eReserve)

AND

“Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of Black Feminist Ideology” by Deborah King (1988)(eReserve)

April 7

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION FEMINIST THEORY & MEN’S FEMINIST THEORY

Reading due: Lorber pp. 218-263

AND

“The Body and Social Practice” in *Gender & Power* by R. W. Connell (1987) (eReserve)

AND

“The Medical Construction of Gender: Case Management of Intersexed Infants” by Suzanne Kessler (1990) (eReserve)

AND

“Gender, Class & Terrorism” by Michael Kimmel (2002) (eReserve)

NOTE Course Withdrawal deadline and conversion to the Pass/Fail option (the later is not recommended for this course) is APRIL 9.**

If you have questions about your progress in class, see me BEFORE it is too late. Please...don't just disappear!

April 9

POSTMODERN FEMINIST & QUEERTHEORY

Reading due: Lorber, pp.264-274

AND

Robyn Wiegman, "Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, v11 i3 (Fall 1999) (eReserve)

AND

Susan Lurie, Ann Cvetkovich, Jane Gallop, Tania Modleski, and Hortense Spillers, "Restoring Feminist Politics to Poststructuralist Critique (Roundtable)," *Feminist Studies*, v27 i3 (Fall 2001): p679(31) (eReserve)

April 14

Excerpt from *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* by Judith Butler (1990) (eReserve)

AND

"Postmodernism, "Realism," the Politics of Identity : Cherie Moraga & Chicana Feminism" by Paula M. L. Moya (eReserve)

AND

"The Social Construction of Same-Sex Desire: Sin, Crime, Sickness" by Nikki Sullivan (from *A Critical Introduction from Queer Theory*) (2003) (eReserve)

TAKE HOME EXAM DISTRIBUTED

April 16

TBA

TAKE HOME EXAM DUE

PART II: FEMINIST THEORIES OF THE BODY

***All readings from this section from Price and Shildrick's *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*

April 23

Shildrick & Price (pp. 1-14)

Schiebinger (pp. 21-31)

Spelman (pp. 32-41)

Birke (pp. 42-49)

April 28

Halberstam (pp.125-133)

Wiley (pp. 134-139)

Haraway (pp. 203-214)

April 30

Riley (pp. 220-226)

Grosz (pp. 381-387)

Price & Shildrick (pp. 388-398)

Davis (pp. 454-465)

PART III: RIDING THE THIRD WAVE

***All readings in this section from Gillis, Howie, and Munford's *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*

May 5

Introduction (pp. xxi-xxxii)

Sanders (pp. 3-15)

Stone (pp. 16-29)

Stryker (pp. 59-70)

May 7

Chakraborty (pp. 101-113)

Moore (pp. 125-143)

Woodhull (pp. 156-167)

Gillis (pp. 168-181)

May 12**LAST CLASS**

Valassopoulos (pp.198-211)

Waters (pp. 250-265)

Mumford (pp. 266-279)

Course Evaluations

May 19

Fem Theory for Dummies Due

[in my mailbox (the old fashioned kind) by 5pm].

