

# WOST 301: Theorizing Women's Issues

University of Massachusetts, Amherst  
Tobin 307 / MW 2:30 a.m.-3:45 p.m.  
Fall 2007

**Professor:** Mary Elizabeth Strunk

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## \* Course Description and Objectives

This reading and writing-intensive course aims to understand feminist theories through the political, historical, and cultural contexts in which they emerged in the United States. Together we will explore how feminist theories have addressed practical questions and debates regarding gender relations, women's lived experiences, and strategies for social change. Our approach to the semester's readings will be steeped in an awareness of intersectionality, or the recognition that forms of oppression based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, sexuality, class, disability and other markers of difference do not act independently of one another.

### Course asks (and answers) why women's studies exists.

Topics will include: first and second wave feminist movements; the social construction of gender, race, and sexuality; reproductive issues; gender, health, and the environment; motherhood and the state; work, class and poverty, media representations of women; international supply chains and human rights; and other issues that class members select as priorities for further study.

## \* Required Texts (Available at Food for Thought Books in Amherst)

- Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, eds., *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (NY: Routledge, 2003). ["Reader"]
- Ruth Rosen. *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (NY: Viking, 2006). ["Rosen"]
- Additional readings, distributed via e-reserves or in class.

## \* Assignments and Deadlines

Participation and in-class writing		20%
First class report	TBD	15%
Second class report	TBD	15%
Midterm / Analytic essay	W 10/31 (dist.); due M Nov. 5.	20%
Third class report (final paper outline)	M 12/3	5%
Final paper	Full draft 12/10; final due noon M 12/17	25%

Total: 100%

## \* Reading/Discussion Schedule:

*What is theory? Who creates theory and how? What is the purpose of theory?*

**W Sept. 5 Course Overview and Introduction**

- Sam Roberts, “For Young Earners in Big City, a Gap in Women’s Favor,” NYT, 8/3/07 + online readers’ comments

*What are the structures that perpetuate social domination?  
To what extent are they universal and to what extent historically specific?*

- M Sept. 10**
- “Declaration of Sentiments” from the 1848 Seneca Falls Conference (handout)
  - E-reserve: Angela Davis, “Class and Race in the Early Women’s Rights Campaign,” (46-49); “Racism in the Woman Suffrage Movement,” (70-86)
  - Reader: Simone de Beauvoir, Introduction to *The Second Sex*, (32-40).

- W Sept. 12**
- Rosen: “Preface” (xi-xvi); Ch. 1, “Dawn of Discontent,” (3-36).
  - Reader: Heidi Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union” (206-221)
  - E-reserve: Gloria Joseph, “The Incompatible Menage à Trois: Marxism, Feminism, and Racism” (91-107).

*What are the different ways of defining women’s oppressions and differences?  
What are the best tools to effect social change? What should “change” look like?*

- M Sept. 17**
- Rosen: Ch. 2, “Female Generation Gap” (37-59); Ch. 3 “Limits of Liberalism” (63-93)

- W Sept. 19**
- E-reserve: Wendy Williams, “The Equality Crisis: Some Reflections on Culture, Courts, and Feminism” (71-91)

*How can we understand gender, class, race/ethnicity as interlocking systems?  
How do racial and ethnic differences alter gender identity and political priorities?  
Is “women” a useful category?*

- M Sept. 24**
- Rosen: Ch. 4 “Leaving the Left” (94-114)
  - Reader: Bonnie Kreps, “Radical Feminism 1” (45-49); The Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement” (164-171)

- W Sept. 26**
- Rosen: Ch. 4 “Leaving the Left” (124-40)
  - Reader: “No More Miss America” (80-82); Charlotte Bunch, “Lesbians in Revolt” (83-87); Donna Kate Rushin, “The Bridge Poem” (172)

- M Oct. 1**
- Reader: Monique Wittig, “One Is Not Born a Woman” (249-254); Norma Alarcón, “The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism” (404-414).

- W Oct. 3**
- Reader: Nancy C.M. Hartsock, “The Feminist Standpoint: Toward a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism” (292-307); Patricia Hill Collins, “The Politics of Black Feminist Thought” (318-333).

- M Oct. 8**      Holiday. No class meeting.

*How important are discourses and power/knowledges in the construction of reality?  
How is gender connected to sexuality? Is "woman" a useful category?*

- T Oct. 9**      University on Monday class schedule
- Rosen: Ch. 5 "Hidden Injuries of Sex" (143-157).
  - E-reserve: Catherine MacKinnon, "Sexuality" 158-180
- W Oct. 10**      • Rosen: Ch. 5 "Hidden Injuries of Sex" (158-195)
- E-reserve: Linda Alcoff, "Cultural feminism versus Post-structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory" (330-355).
- M Oct. 15**      • Reader: Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality v. Difference" (378-389).

*Is biology destiny? How have categories of sex and gender been shaped  
by scientific inquiry? Do we perform our gender or does it perform us?*

- W Oct. 17**      • Reader: Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (391-403).
- Handout: "The Iceland Exception: A Land Where Girls Rule in Math," Time, March 7, 2005.
- M Oct. 22**      • E-reserve: Nelly Oudshoorn, "Sex and the Body" (6-9) Emily Martin, "The Egg and the Sperm" (10-15); Atul Gawande, "The Score: How Childbirth Went Industrial," *New Yorker*, Oct, 9, 2006 (on-line: [http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/10/09/061009fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/10/09/061009fa_fact)).
- W Oct. 24**      • E-reserve: Robert Wilson, *Feminine Forever* (excerpts); Judith A. Houck, "'What Do These Women Want?': Feminists Respond to *Feminine Forever*, 1963-1980" (209-228); "Epilogue: Menopause at the Turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" (229-239).
- M Oct. 29**      • Reader: Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (415-427).
- W Oct. 31**      • E-reserve: Anne Fausto-Sterling, Ch. 3, "Of Gender and Genitals: The Use and Abuse of the Modern Intersexual" (45-77).
- Analytic essay question distributed at the end of class*

*How should feminist thinkers navigate the public/private divide? How is the status of motherhood changing  
(or not changing) and what are the consequences?*

- M Nov. 5**      **Midterm Essay due at the start of class**
- E-reserve: Ann Crittenden, "The Mommy Tax" (366-376).
  - In-class screening: *The Motherhood Manifesto*, 2006
- W Nov. 7**      • E-reserve: Ann Ferguson, "On Conceiving Motherhood and Sexuality: A Feminist Materialist Approach" (153-182).
- M Nov. 12**      Holiday. No class meeting.
- W Nov. 14**      • E-reserve: Arlie R. Hochschild, "Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value" (130-146)

- In-class screening: *Maid in America* (2005)

*What has been the relationship between feminism(s) and the environment?  
How do environmental issues alter or re-inscribe gender?*

- M Nov. 19**     • E-reserve: Virginia A. Scharff, “Man and Nature! Sex Secrets of Environmental History” (3-19); E-reserves: Sandra Steingraber, “Rose Moon” (544-553)
- W Nov. 21**     • E-reserve: Ynestra King, “The Ecofeminist Imperative” (553-556); “First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, “Principles of Environmental Justice” (556-557).  
• Text: Noel Sturgeon, “Ecofeminist Appropriations and Transnational Environmentalisms” (113-125).
- W Nov. 21**     Individual meetings to discuss final paper topics.  
Thanksgiving recess begins this evening.
- M Nov. 26**     • E-reserve: Nancy Langston, “Gender Transformed: Endocrine Disruptors in the Environment” (129-166) Marcy Jane Knopf-Newman, “Public Eyes: Investigating the Causes of Breast Cancer” (161-176)  
• In-class screening: *Rachel’s Daughters* (1997)
- W Nov. 28**     • E-reserve: Barbara Ehrenreich, “Welcome to Cancerland,” *Harper’s*, Nov. 2001.  
In-class discussion of final papers.

*How does one attempt to tell the story of feminism? In dominant narratives, what is most often forgotten or left out? Why? Where is feminism headed from here? (And where is “here”?)*

- M Dec. 3**        **Final Paper Proposals due at the start of class.**  
• Rosen: Ch. 9, “From Sisterhood to Superwoman” (295-330); “Epilogue: Beyond Backlash” (331-344).  
• E-reserves: “A Look at Hillary Clinton’s Campaign Strategies”; Supreme Court Decision and Dissenting Opinion: “Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co, Inc.” May 29, 2007.
- W Dec. 5**        • Reader: Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience” (460-471); JeeYeun Lee, “Beyond Bean Counting” (472-476).
- M Dec. 10**       Reports on final papers.
- W Dec. 12**       Reports on final papers. Course review and wrap-up.

**FINAL PAPER due at NOON on MONDAY, DECEMBER 17.**

### \* Course Structure

What a deliciously challenging semester of inquiry we have before us. As befits a theory course at the 300-level, our class meetings will be run seminar-style. This means that we will spend most of our time in conversation. What rare lectures there are will be brief and designed to reiterate the theoretical and historical ground we have trod. It is imperative that you come to class having read *carefully* and having written down any questions that you have about

the readings. If you find a particular passage or line of argument confounding, it is likely that others of us are struggling with it, too. We will devote ample time in class to close re-readings of the texts, both to ensure our comprehension and as the basis for our critiques. As you can see from the syllabus, we will also be reading Ruth Rosen's "memoir" of the so-called Second Wave movement, plus a number of shorter, non-theoretical works to give both context and "legs" to the theory that we are studying. I will likely distribute other relevant, short articles as these emerge from contemporary events. It is your job to prepare yourself to think critically, to articulate ideas clearly, and to listen attentively and respectfully to your classmates, who may have perspectives quite different from your own. Anything of a confidential nature that emerges in our class discussions will remain confidential and must not go beyond the classroom.

### \* Readings

Reading well means reading with a pencil in hand and taking the time to make marginal notes on the author's arguments and your responses to them. These notes are invaluable. They greatly enhance comprehension and also elevate the level of our class discussions. (When you are reading for multiple classes, you know how essential notes are for jogging your memory about a particular article under discussion.) A set of reliable reading notes also makes studying and paper-writing far, far easier than it would be if you had to re-enter the readings "cold." In our class meetings, we will frequently parse specific sections of what we have read, so **you must always bring to class the text or articles to be discussed that day.** \* A Note on E-reserve articles: As course readers have become more and more expensive, e-reserves are now the most economical way to assemble readings for class. **You are required to print out all e-reserve articles so that you can bring them to class.** If you do not have access to a printer, OIT will print them out for you for a fee. One paper copy of each e-reserve article will be available during regular business hours in the Women's Studies office (208 Bartlett).

### \* Participation / Short written assignments / In-class quizzes (20%)

You will receive frequent, short writing assignments that will enable you to experiment with new ideas, while also allowing me to give you regular feedback on your progress. Your class participation grade will be based on your performance on these assignments, plus the quality of your participation in class. Obviously, being absent or late to class will adversely affect your grade. Students with more than three or more unexcused absences will automatically have their grades lowered.

### \* Class Report (30% — 2 @ 15% each)

At the start of the semester, each student will sign up to prepare a class report for two different weeks' reading. Students will write a short essay (2-3 pages) that critically evaluate the week's readings, noting their key points and also their potential blind spots. The essay should also draw on the readings to put forward your own answer to one of the week's questions. Students will read the essay in class, in the style of a conference paper. The goals of this assignment is three-fold: (1) to allow each student to develop a considered argument on the set of readings s/he finds most interesting; (2) to generate class discussion by offering a point of view on the seminar question; (3) to incorporate the group's feedback into a lengthier rumination that will become the final term paper. **The class report must be delivered to Professor Strunk a minimum of 48 hours before it is delivered in class.** You may email the report, but it is your responsibility to make sure it arrives safely. You may send a Word attachment as long as you **also cut-and-paste your essay into the body of the email.**

### \* Midterm / Analytic Essay (20%)

The midterm will be a 6-8 page (typed and double spaced) analytic essay that draws on class readings to respond to a question distributed in class on October 31. The essay will be due at the start of class on Monday, Nov. 5.

### \* Final Paper (30%)

The final paper will evolve from one of your class reports. Depending on the topic, it may either take the form of a research paper or an extended thought paper. This culminating assignment, which will account for almost a third of your grade, must demonstrate your command of the debate around a particular issue while also offering defense or critique of a particular feminist theoretical approach. Your argument may draw on the assigned course readings,

but the signaling plus your ability to go beyond the readings and delve critically into your specialized topic.

**\* Deadlines**

Most of the written assignments are time-sensitive, especially the discussion-leading web post. Turn in all written assignments on the due date. Except with prior approval of the professor or in the case of extreme emergencies, late assignments will not be accepted.

**\* Academic Honesty**

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty (knowingly helping another student to cheat). You can review University's official policy on academic honesty here: <http://www.umass.edu/umhome/policies/honesty.html> .