

Women's Studies 201: Critical Perspectives in Women's Studies

Course Information

Professor	Miliann Kang Assistant Professor, Women's Studies Program, UMass Amherst
Office Location & Number	Bartlett 73 (basement), 577-0710 or 545-1922 (Women's Studies office)
Office Hours	Mon, Wed 12:30-1:30 and by appointment
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Class Info	Fall 2008, Bartlett 119

Course Description

The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized.

Audre Lorde, *Sister*, p. 36

The story is older than my body, my mother's, my grandmother's. For years we have been passing it on so that it may live, shift, and circulate.

Trinh. T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other*, p. 137

This course will introduce you to the vibrant field of Women's Studies and its unique interdisciplinary perspective grounded in a commitment to individual and social transformation. Questions that we will interrogate throughout the semester include: What does it mean to be a woman? How is the category of "woman" constructed differently across social groups, cultures and historical periods? Are there common experiences and essential characteristics that define all women? How do the differences between women according to race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and nationality complicate our commonalities? How do we integrate these cross-cutting categories in analyzing women's multiple identities and social positions? How can an understanding of women's lives empower us to act as agents of personal and social change? In exploring these questions, the course material will incorporate social science research, literature, political essays, film, poetry and art. The course has a strong comparative focus between women in the U.S. and women around the world, emphasizing transnational linkages and the processes of globalization.

Readings

Required Texts: All books are available at Food for Thought Books, 106 East Pleasant St. 413-253-5432 in Amherst Center and are also on reserve in the library. Additional readings will be distributed.

- 1) *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World*, by Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006).
- 2) Alice Walker. *The Color Purple* (New York: Harcourt, 1982).
- 3) Maureen Sullivan. *The Family of Woman: Lesbian Mothers, Their Children, and the Undoing of Gender*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
- 4) Additional short readings, distributed via e-reserves, SPARK or in class. Ereserve password: wost201f

Goals & Organization

- 1) to gain an understanding of the major intellectual concepts and debates that are the foundation of a Women's Studies interdisciplinary perspective.
- 2) to develop a feminist analysis that enables you to view yourself and your various social worlds (family, school, workplace, hometown, country, environment, etc.) through a critical "gender lens" that prioritizes the experiences and contributions of women.
- 3) to master the basic tools of feminist inquiry – including the ability to identify gendered processes, to pose theoretical questions, to understand current debates, and to learn methods of research, criticism and advocacy.
- 4) to engage actively with feminist concerns in the college and local community.
- 5) to gain a deeper understanding of yourself, your relationships and the society in which you live
- 6) to envision social institutions, policies, relations, ideologies and practices that foster respect, health, safety, equality, esteem and empowerment of all women.
- 7) to develop written and verbal skills for developing ideas, exchanging ideas with others, and presenting these ideas to a broader audience
- 8) to create a learning environment that instills confidence in your abilities to articulate and interpret your own experiences, and to empower you to take action on the things you care about.

Approach to Readings and Course Material

This course aims to give you an experience of Women's Studies as an integrated intellectual perspective with numerous cross-currents and debates across interdisciplinary boundaries. Introductory courses can be both exciting and frustrating in that they cover so many topics in such a short period of time. Thus, I have designed the course to give you both breadth and depth as you venture into new intellectual terrain. The main reader for the course, *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World* (henceforth referred to as *Text*) addresses the many broad subfields within Women's Studies. I have also assigned selections from two full-length books. The first, *The Family of Woman*, examines lesbian-headed families and addresses the course sections on sexualities, reproduction, women and work. The second, *The Color Purple*, is a classic work of fiction by Alice Walker (winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award) about two African American sisters whose lives take them to different parts of the world (the U.S. South and Africa) yet are intricately connected by issues of gender, race, trauma, globalization and ultimately love. Rather than completing one section and moving on to another topic, we will weave and layer the many different strands of feminist thought, drawing connections and contrast between different authors and analytical approaches.

Your comprehension of the material will be greatly enhanced if you take the time to make notes on the author's arguments and your responses to them. Careful notes greatly enhance comprehension and also elevate the level of our class discussions. Reliable reading notes also makes studying and paper writing far, far easier than it would be if you had to reconstruct the readings "cold." In our class meetings, we will frequently refer to 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 and SPARK articles: As course readers have become more and more expensive, e-reserves and SPARK are now the most economical way to assemble readings for class. You are required to print out all articles and bring them to class. If you do not have access to a printer, OIT will print them out for you for a fee. If you find yourself having a problem with this system, I trust that let me know BEFORE the day that readings are due.

Requirements

Many of us have intense feelings about our gendered identities and the practices and structures that shape them. Thus, I ask that we work together to create a space that honors the sensitivity of the issues we will discuss. I ask each of you to take responsibility for building a classroom environment based on trust, confidentiality and community while at the same time challenging each other in intellectually rigorous

discussions. It is fine to share personal experiences where appropriate, but please do so as a way of illustrating or engaging with debates in the readings rather than substituting anecdotes for critical thinking.

This course follows a seminar format, which means that it is based mostly on class discussion and interactive learning exercises rather than lectures. This requires that you come prepared to think critically, articulate ideas coherently, listen attentively and respect the diversity of experiences and perspectives of your classmates. Because active class participation is so important for the success of this class, I have designed the assignments to facilitate deeper engagement with the readings and richer discussions. The class is structured around frequent, shorter assignments which allow me to provide you with regular feedback. In other words, this is not a course that you will be able to “cram” for. In order to do well in this course, you must take time to digest and integrate the course material through consistent work over the course of the semester.

- **Class participation, Homework Assignments and In-class Writing (25%)** Class participation will include regular attendance, informed and thoughtful contributions to discussion, in-class writing, and participation in group exercises. You are expected to keep up with the readings and come to class prepared with comments and questions. You are expected to attend every class session and to let me know the reason for absences, preferably ahead of time. Students who have more than THREE unexcused absences will have their grades penalized. The attendance sheet will be passed out only at the beginning of class. I will periodically assign short (hopefully fun and creative) homework assignments designed to enrich understanding of the readings through applications to your current social world. (eg. I may ask you to interview a roommate or friend, observe social interactions in your dorm, or collect data from the TV or Internet and then report your findings to the class). I will also ask you to hand in short written responses in class. I utilize frequent, short exercises, or what English professor Peter Elbow refers to as “low stakes writing” as a way of helping you to synthesize the course material and generate your own analysis.
- **Class Discussant and SPARK post (10%) and Discussant Essay Revision (10% - 2-3 pages)** You will sign up to be a class discussant for one class session. This will involve writing a short essay, analyzing and critiquing (not merely summarizing) the assigned readings, presenting your arguments briefly to the class (5 minutes), generating discussion questions and leading discussion. In most cases, you will work together with at least one other student and present on the same readings, I encourage you to meet with each other and find engaging ways to collaborate (eg. One of you can address the strengths, the other focus on the weaknesses; one of you can lead an exercise, the other analyze it, etc). You will each, however, submit, your own written memo, which you must email to me by **no later than 11 a.m. on the day before the discussion** is to take place. I will then make comments on your essay and post it to SPARK. The rest of the class will read the paper ahead of class time and class members are welcome to post their own comments. This can be a little nerve-wracking for some students, but it has proven to be a very effective learning tool. First, it gives you the opportunity to engage in public discourse with myself and your peers. Don't worry –we will offer constructive comments urging you to clarify and develop your own ideas. Second, you then have the opportunity to revise and refine your ideas after engaging in discussion about them. Unless otherwise determined, discussants will present on the Thurs of the week they have signed up for. You will then submit a revision of your essay within a week after you present.
- **On-Line Quizzes (20%)** I will post very short multiple choice exams every week as a way of checking in that you are understanding the readings and engaging with the course material. I will take the top 10 quiz grades (allowing you to drop or miss up to 4 quizzes). The quizzes will be posted on Thurs and you must take them by the following Tues before class. There will be two longer required quizzes after the sections on each of the books (*The Family of Woman* and *The Color Purple*) so all students must take these and these scores will not be dropped.
- **Group Research/Action Project (35%)** This assignment is designed to help you synthesize and apply the readings toward understanding and shaping own social worlds, to foster collaborative learning,

to develop public presentation skills, and to get you out of the classroom and into the streets! Students will work together to design a project based on one of the course topics. Possible projects include: organizing an activist event on campus or in the community; proposing a policy for political or social change; creating collective artwork (mural, sculptures, video, theatrical performance); writing and reading poetry, short stories or other creative writings; researching a topic of local concern (date rape, gender pay gap at the university, immigrant women's work in the Pioneer Valley, funding for women's sports, etc.). You will report and analyze your project in both oral and written form as follows:

- 1) **Prospectus (5%)** You will each individually write a plan for completing your group project, including the topic, goals, implementation, contribution by each individual member, schedule for completion and selected readings. This will be in collaboration with your group, but you will submit an individual report.
- 2) **Group Presentation (10%)** You will work with a group of about five students to organize and lead a class session on a specific topic of your choice. I encourage you to connect with local organizations and/or attend events and activities pertaining to your topic (eg. interview a midwife, attend meetings of feminist organizations on campus and/or in the community, observe gendered interactions at a fraternity party). I also encourage you to use visual aids, multimedia, role plays, etc. to make your class presentation original and engaging. You can regard your group presentation as an opportunity for you to present the arguments and findings from your research project (see below) while drawing connections between your topic and the work of your classmates. Your group will receive one collaborative grade.
- 3) **Research Report (20% total) (5-6 pages)** You will submit an individual research report that describes your group project, assesses its strengths and weaknesses, and links your findings to support or refute arguments in the readings. While you should include relevant background sources, I do not expect you to conduct extensive library research, but to concentrate on applying and synthesizing the assigned course readings and discussions to your groups' findings and arguments. We are not having a final exam so this research report must demonstrate your mastery of the course readings. You will each receive an individual grade for your paper.

→ Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty, in any form, will not be tolerated and you are responsible for educating yourself about the University's official policy on academic honesty <<http://www.umass.edu/umhome/policies/honesty.html>

If an instructor finds that a student has violated the University's Academic Honesty Policy, the instructor has the right to lower the student's grade, or even to fail the student for the course. Students have the right to appeal such a grade penalty by an instructor. The University Academic Honesty Board, which must be notified by instructors of any grade penalty, reviews all student appeals. The Board may sustain or recommend modification of the penalty given by the faculty member, or may recommend sanctions exceeding those originally given, such as suspension or expulsion from the University.

→ Special Opportunities

Frequently, the issues we cover in this class will overlap with topics that you are studying in your other classes or may be covered in the news, contemporary political debates, or popular culture. I encourage you to be on the lookout for such intersections, and to share them with the class when appropriate. We are lucky to be in the Five College area, in which there are so many relevant and stimulating events. On our SPARK site, I'll keep a running list of events that are especially relevant to this class; please feel free to notify me of any such events or student opportunities that I might have missed. You will not be given direct credit for attending these events but they will indirectly improve your grade by informing your class participation, leading discussion and your project and paper.

→ 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 documented emergencies, late assignments will not be accepted.

→ Do I Need to Proofread?

The answer is yes. A sloppy paper detracts mightily from your argument. We all make honest mistakes. But it is disrespectful to submit hastily prepared work to your professor and peers and your grade will reflect this.

→ **Assignments and Deadlines**

Participation, homework, in-class writing		25%
Discussion-leading + SPARK post	TBD (individual sign-up)	10%
Exploration paper revision	Within one week of discussion-leading	10%
On-line quizzes	10 out of 14 weeks	20%
Project proposal	Proposal due – Nov 4	5%
Group presentation	TBD (group sign-up)	10%
Final project report and analysis	Due in class, last day, Dec 11	20%

Total: 100%

Course Schedule

- I reserve the right to make changes in the schedules as I see appropriate.
- I will also post related news and magazine articles on SPARK – please check frequently.
- Films will be viewed in class: We will only see a brief segment of most of the films listed below – films will be on reserve in the library for one week after we see them in class for those who miss them or wish to see the entire film. You are responsible for the content of the films, as they will be referred to in quizzes and you should incorporate them where appropriate into your essays and final paper.

Sept 2 Introductions, Course Overview

- Case study: Sarah Palin and the politics of gender in the upcoming presidential elections

Sept 4 Gender as a Social Construction

In-class screening: *The Miracle of Life UM Media Video V 2293*

- Text: Part 1
 ___ “Social and Historical Constructions of Gender” (pp.1-5)
 • Text: Section 1, A, B + p. 19
 ___A: Nelly Oudshoorn, “Sex and the Body,” p. 6
 ___B: Emily Martin, “The Egg and the Sperm,” p. 10
 ___ + Joan Scott, “Gender and the Politics of History,” p. 19

Sept 4 Sex Differences and Changing Ideas of Gender

- Text: Section 1, D, E
 ___D: Charlotte Furth, “Androgynous Males and Deficient Females: Biology and Gender Boundaries in 16th and 17th Century China,” p. 21
 ___E: Carole S. Vance, “Social Construction Theory: Problems in the History of Sexuality,” p. 29

Sept 9 The Rise of Western Science

In-class screening: *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman - “The Hottentot Venus” UMASS V1845*

- Text: Section 2, A, C, D, E
 ___A: Linda Gordon “Magic,” p. 33
 ___B: Anne Fausto-Sterling, “The Biological Connection,” p. 41
 ___D: Stephen Jay Gould, “Women’s Brains,” p. 43
 ___E: Udo Schuklnk et al, “The Ethics of Genetic Research on Sexual Orientation,” p. 47

Sept 11 The Making of Race, Sex, and Empire

- Text: Section 3, A, C, E
 ___A: Ian F. Haney López, “The Social Construction of Race,” p. 52
 ___C: Anna Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood,” p. 60
 ___E: Evelyn M. Hammonds, “New Technologies of Race,” p. 69

(Monday, Sept 15 – Last Day to Drop/Add)

Sept 16 History of Medicine: Case Study of Birthing Practices

- Text: Section 4, D, E
 ___D: Ben Barker-Benfield, “Sexual Surgery in Late 19th Century America,” p. 85
 ___E: Rogaia Abusharaf, “Unmasking Tradition,” p. 91
 • Text: Section 4, B
 ___B: Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English, “Exorcising the Midwives,” p. 77
 • SPARK or online:
 “The Score: How Childbirth Went Industrial,” Atul Gawande, *New Yorker*, Oct, 9, 2006.

- Sept 18** **Population Control and Reproductive Rights**
In class screening: *Skin Deep*-Smith College Call # RG137.6.N68 S55 1997
• Text: Section 5, A, B, C
___A: Susan Davis, "Contested Terrain: The Historical Struggle for Fertility Control," p. 99
___B: Angela Davis, "Reproductive Rights," p. 103
___C: Betsy Hartmann, "Family Matters," p. 107
• ___<http://popdev.hampshire.edu/projects/dt/40>
"10 Reasons to Rethink Overpopulation," The Population and Development Program at Hampshire College, *differenTakes* No. 40, Fall 2006
- Sept 23** **Health Education and Advocacy**
• Text: Section 6, B, C
___B: Sandra Morgen, "Conceiving History," p. 129
___C: Nadia Farah, "The Egyptian Women's Health Book Collective," p. 133
• on-line <http://www.barbaraehrenreich.com/cancerland.htm>
___ Barbara Ehrenreich, "Welcome to Cancerland," *Harper's*, Nov. 2001.
- Sept 25** **Global Health Systems and Inequalities**
• In-class screening: *YESTERDAY* (2005)
• Text: Section 6, A, D, E
___A: Maureen Larkin, "Global Aspects of Health and Health Policy in 3rd World Countries," p. 119
___D: Andrea Densham, "CDC, NIH, ACS, FDA—Alphabet City: The Institutional and Organizational Terrain of Breast Cancer and AIDS Activism," p. 135
___E: Kathryn Corovano, "More Than Mothers and Whores: Redefining the AIDS Prevention Needs of Women," p. 138
- Sept 30** **Sexualities and Changing Family Structures**
The Family of Woman, pp. 1-61
Introduction
1. The Emergence of Lesbian-Coparent Families in Postmodern Society
2. Becoming Parents: Baby Making in the Age of Assisted Procreation
- Oct 2** **Families: What Changes, What Stays the Same**
The Family of Woman, pp. 62-156
3. Being Parents: The End of Oedipus and the Expansion of Intimacy
4. Undoing the Gender Division of Labor
- Oct 7** **Feminist Families: New Definitions of Families and Communities**
The Family of Woman, 157-230 (pick either Chapter 5 or 6)
5. Truth and Reconciliation: Families of Origin Come Around and Come Out
6. Becoming Familiar in the Community of Strangers
7. The Structure of Donor-Extended Kinship
8. The Theoretical Future of a Conscious Feminist Kinship
Optional-Appendix: Families by the Bay: The Study Design, Method, and Participants
- Oct 9** **Gendered Identities in Nations and States**
• Text: Part 2, pp. 149-154
• Text: Section 7, A; Section 8, A
___7A: Carole Pateman, "Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy," p. 155
___8A: Jan Jindy Pettman, "Women, Gender, and the State," p. 174
- Oct 14** **NO CLASS – MONDAY SCHEDULE**
- Oct 16** **Gender, Race, Sexualities and the State**
Text: Section 8, B, C, D
___8B: Jeffrey Weeks, "Power and the State," p. 181
___8C: Margot Bardan, "Competing Agenda," p. 185
___8D: Gail Bederman, "Remaking Manhood through Race and 'Civilization'," p. 190
- Oct 21** **New Social Movements and Identity Politics / Feminist Organizing Across Borders**

- Text: Part 2; Section 9, A, C, D, E
- ___A: Kathryn Woodward, "Concepts of Identity and Difference," p. 195
- ___C: Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," p. 200
- ___D: Alma M. Garcia, "The Development of Chicana Feminist Discourse," p. 207
- ___E: Lisa Duggan, "Making It Perfectly Queer," p. 211
- ___+Benedict Anderson, "Imagined Communities," p. 218

Oct 23 Group Project – In class work session

Oct 28 Race, Gender, Class in Informal Service Jobs

- In-class screening: *MAID IN AMERICA* (2005)
<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/maidinamerica/film.html>
- Text: Part 4, Section 22 A, B
- ___A: Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Women and Labor Migration," p. 444
- ___B: Leslie Salzinger, "A Maid by Any Other Name: The Transformation of 'Dirty Work' by Central American Immigrants," p. 449
- ___C: Rigoberta Menchu, "A Maid in the Capital," p. 453

Oct 30 Women, Work, Immigration: Case Study of the Nail Salon Industry

(SPARK) Excerpts from Miliann Kang, *Nailed: Gender, Race and Immigration in Body Service Work*

Nov 4 Women Creating and Being Created: Gender and Representation

] Final project prospectus due in class

- In-class screening: *Guerrillas in Our Midst* UMASS V 841
- Text: Section 12, Intro, A, C, E
- ___"Representations, Cultures, Media, Markets," (pp. 265-268)
- ___A: John Berger, "Ways of Seeing," p. 269
- ___C: Suzanne Lustig, "How and Why Did the Guerrilla Girls Alter the Art World Establishment?"

Nov 6 Gender and Consumption,

- ___E: William Wresch, "World Media," p. 307
- Text: Section 17, C, F
- ___C: Roland Marchand "Grotesque Modern," p. 356
- ___F: Rone Tempest: "Barbie and the World Economy," p. 363

Nov. 11 (Tues) NO CLASS – VETERAN'S DAY

Nov 12 (Wed) CLASS MEETS, TUES SCHEDULE

Sexualities, Cyberculture, Tourism

- Text: Section 18, B
- ___B: Juana María Rodríguez, "Welcome to the Global Stage: Confessions...Cyber-Slut," p. 371
- Text: Part 4, Section 22 D
- ___D: Satoko Watanabe, "From Thailand to Japan: Migrant Sex Workers as Autonomous Subjects," p. 458
- E-reserves
- ___ Felicity Schaeffer-Grabiell, "Planet-Love.com: Cyberbrides in the Americas and the Transnational Routes of U.S. Masculinity," *Signs*, vol. 31, no. 2, wtr 2006.

Nov 13 Gendering Globalization: Economic and Wartime Refugees

- Text: Section 19, Intro, A
- ___"Gendering Globalization and Displacement" (pp. 383-387)
- ___A: "On the Beach: Sexism and Tourism"
- Text: Section 20, A, C
- ___A: Lydia Potts, "Excerpt from the World Labor Market: A History of Migration," p. 411
- ___C: Phil Marfleet, "The Refugee," p. 419

Nov 18 The Gendered Nature of Eco-Devastation and Activism

- Text: Section 24, C; Conclusion, A
- ___C: Helen Zweifel, "The Gendered Nature of Biodiversity Conservation," p. 485

- ___Conclusion, A: Cynthia Enloe, "Beyond the Global Victim," p. 496
- Visit "Sustainable South Bronx" <http://www.ssbx.org/>
 - Majora Carter's "Greening the Ghetto" speech (Feb. 2005):
<http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/view/id/53>

- Nov 20** **Intersectionality in Art and Fiction**
The Color Purple, p. 1-99
- Nov 22** **Writing Identities, Trauma and Healing**
The Color Purple, p. 100-192
- Nov 25** **Novels, Movies and their Legacies**
In class screening: *The Color Purple*
The Color Purple, 193-294
Reserves: excerpt from Alice Walker's *The Same River Twice*
- Nov 27** **NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK**
- Dec 2** Final Action Project presentations.
- Dec 4** Final Action Project presentations.
- Dec 9** Final Action Project presentations.
- Dec 11** Course overview and Final Papers Due at Beginning of Class.

Final Project Report and Analysis due in class on Thursday, Dec 11.