

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 11-12, Wed 12:30-1:30 and by appointment
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Class Info	Spring 2006, Mon and Wed, 2:30-3:45, Bartlett 127

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, McGraw-Hill, 2006. ISBN: 0-288718-4
- 2) *Domestica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadow of Affluence*, by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, University of California Press, 2001.
- 3) *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, by Marjane Satrapi, Pantheon Books, 2003.

Goals & Organization

Goals

- 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.

Organization

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, *Persepolis: The Story of A Childhood*, is a memoir of a girl growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. In addition to focusing on this historical and regional study, it integrates course sections on socialization, identities, war and militarization. The second, *Domestica*, examines relations between Latina domestics and their employers, and addresses the course sections on women and work, globalization, migration and diaspora. 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.

Requirements

We all have intense feelings about our gendered identities and the practices and structures that shape them. Let's work together to create a space that honors the sensitivity and privacy 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.

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 (30%)** 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 do short written responses in class periodically.

- **Class Discussant and Essay (15% - 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. You will work together with another 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 post to Web CT by noon of the day before you are to be a discussant. Unless otherwise determined, discussants will present on the Wed of the week they have signed up for.

- **Midterm Exam (20%) (4-5 pages)** The exam will ask you to synthesize and critique the readings. I want you to demonstrate mastery of the readings while asserting your own ideas and arguments about the topics we have addressed.

- **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%)** Your group members will collectively write a plan for completing your group project, including the topic, goals, implementation, contribution by each individual member, schedule and selected readings.
 - 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)** Your research report will describe your group project, its strengths and weaknesses, and how your findings support or refute the 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.

Course Schedule

(I reserve the right to make changes in the schedules as I see appropriate.)

Part I – Women's Bodies in Science and Culture (Weeks 1-4)

Week One

- Feb 1** **Introduction to the Course** - What is Women's Studies? Why should I study it?
Wed
- Gloria Steinem, "If Men Could Menstruate." Ms Magazine, October 1978. (in-class)
 - Overview of course content, assignments and expectations. Self-introductions.

Week Two

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

- Feb 6** **What is Gender?: Scientific and Social Constructions**
Mon
- (e-reserves) Jagger and Rothenberg, "Theories of Women's Subordination"
 - Introduction (Text)

- Feb 8** **Sex Differences Across Cultures**
Wed
- Part I, Sec 1: B, D, E (Text)
 - *Film: The Miracle of Life*

Week Three

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

- Feb 13** **The Rise of Western Science**
Mon
- Sec 2: B, C, D, E (Text)

- Feb 15** **Making of Race, Sex and Empire**
Wed
- Part I, Sec 3: A, B, E Sec 4: D, E (Text)
- Film: Warrior Marks*

Week Four

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

- Feb 20** **NO CLASS**
Mon

- Feb 21** **Medicine in a Historical Perspective: Medicalized Motherhood, Birth and Midwifery**
Tues
- Part I, Sec 3: C, Sec 4: B, C Sec 6: B (Text)
 - (e-reserves) Excerpt from Naomi Wolf's *Misconceptions*
 - (handout) DaSilva, Melanie, "A Brief History of Childbirth in America"

Feb 22 **Population Control and Reproductive Rights**
Wed Part I, Sec 5: A, B, D, E (Text) Film: *The Ultimate Test Animal*

Part II – Gendered States: Individuals, Communities, Nations (Weeks 5-7)

Week Five

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

Feb 27 **Gendering the Nation-State: Citizenship**
Mon Part II, Intro, Sec 7: A, C, D, E

March 1 **Gender and the Rise of Modern States**
Wed Part II, Sec 8: A, B, C, D (Text)
Persepolis, pp. 3-39

Week Six

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

March 6 **Muslim Women: Identities and Organizing**
Mon Part II, Sec 10: B, Sec 11: B
Persepolis, pp. 40-117

March 8 **Gender and Nationalism**
Wed Section 10: A, C, D, Sec 15: C
Persepolis, pp. 118-153

Week Seven

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

March 13 **New Social Movements and Identity Politics**
Mon ▪ Part II, Sec 9: A, C, D, E (Text)
Film: Tongues Untied

March 15 **Feminist Organizing Across Borders** **Midterm Take-Home Exam Due in class**
Wed Part II, Sec 11: A, B, D, E

SPRING BREAK – MARCH 20-26

Part III – Gendering Globalization and Displacement (Weeks 8-10)

Week Eight

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

March 27 **Women, Work and Immigration**
Mon ▪ *Domestica*, Part I, pp. 3-62
▪ Part IV, Sec 22, A (Text)
▪ Film: *Maid in America*

March 29 **Race, Gender and Class in the Informal Service Sector**
Wed *Domestica*, Part II, pp. 63-136
Part IV, Sec 22, B, C

Week Nine

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

April 3 **Negotiating Intimate Social Relations and Inequalities Between Women**
Mon *Domestica*, Part III, pp. 137-245

April 5 **Gendering Globalization: Travel and Tourism**
Wed Part IV: Intro, Sec 19, A, C, D

Week Ten

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

April 10 **Relocation and Removal**
Mon

- Sec 20, A, B, C, D
- *Film: Sidet: Forced Exile*

April 12 **Diasporas**
Wed Sec 21, A, C, D

PART IV - Identities, Culture, and Representations (Weeks 11-13)

Week Eleven

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

April 17 **HOLIDAY – NO CLASS**
Mon

April 19 **Representational Practices and Artistic Production**
Wed

- Part III: Intro, Sec 12, A, B, C, Sec 13, A, B, D

Film: Guerrillas in Our Midst

Week Twelve

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

April 24 **Gender, Media and Representing Women in Colonial Contexts**
Mon Sec 14: C, D, E and Sec 15: A, B, D

April 26 **Consumer Culture, Advertising and Cyberculture**
Wed

- Part III: Sec 16, A, B, D, Sec 18, A, B, C (Text)

Week Thirteen

Discussants: 1) _____ 2) _____

May 1 **Beauty Culture: Commodifying the Body**
Mon

- Part III, Sec 17, A, B, D, E, F

Film: Perfect Image

May 3 **Beauty Service Work: Case Study of Asian-owned Nail Salons**
Wed [E-reserves] - Miliann Kang, "The Managed Hand: The Commercialization of Bodies and Emotions in Korean-owned Nail Salons," *Gender and Society*

Part V – Student Group Presentations and Course Conclusion (Week 14-15)

Week Fourteen

May 8 **Group Presentations**
Mon

May 10 **Group Presentations**
Wed

Week Fifteen

May 15 **Group Presentations**
Mon

May 17
Wed

Course Conclusion and Evaluation: Conclusion A (Text) FINAL PAPER DUE IN CLASS