

Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies 691b: Issues in Feminist Research – Spring 2019

We are excited to organize this course around a new and innovative format this semester! The course will be co-facilitated by Profs. Miliann Kang and Banu Subramaniam and will be organized in conjunction with a WGSS public speaker series. For most class sessions, we will have a panel of 3-4 guest speakers from 2:30-3:30 who will share their own research, reflections and provocations on the readings and themes of the week and then we will meet separately as a class from 3:30-5 pm. This will give students the opportunity to directly engage with and learn from feminist faculty about their own challenges, approaches and lessons to feminist research while also diving deep into readings and discussion as a class. (We will confirm and post specific speakers separately.)

Course Information

Professors	Miliann Kang and Banu Subramaniam Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies / UMass Amherst
Office Location & Number	South College W469 545-1922 (WGSS office)
Office Hours	Wed 5-6 pm and by appointment
Email	mkang@umass.edu and banu@umass.edu
Class Info	Spring 2019 / Wed / 2:30-5:00pm South College Room W219

Readings

Required Texts: Additional readings are available on Moodle.

- Hemmings, Clare. 2011. *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*. Durham: Duke University Press. ISBN: 978-0-8223-4916-7
- Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar. 2006. *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. ISBN-13: 978-0-8166-4770-5

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* (1984, 2007) p. 36

What is the "quality of light by which we scrutinize" (Lorde 1984) not only our own lives, but the lives of others and the structures, events and narratives that shape them? How does this quality of light influence how and what we know, and what the claims and consequences of this knowledge are, or can be?

This graduate course on *Issues in Feminist Research* examines theories, debates and practices regarding feminist epistemologies (how we know) and methodologies (how we produce what we know). Questions we will explore include: What is feminist research? What makes feminist research feminist? Why is feminist research important? How do we do feminist research? Who are the subjects of feminist research? What are the stakes and contexts which shape the production of feminist research? What are the different

genealogies, current practices and future directions of feminist research? Is my own research feminist, do I want it to be, and what are the challenges and rewards of doing feminist research?

Central themes and issues that will guide our inquiry include: the politics of knowledge construction; power and authority in asserting knowledge claims; practices of writing, representation and interpretation; voice, subjectivity, reflexivity and authenticity; ethics, accountability and reciprocity in relations with research subjects and audiences; disciplinary and inter/disciplinary boundaries; and goals, contexts, applications and limitations of feminist research. Based on the areas of interest and specialization of the students, we may delve more deeply into different methods, such as ethnography, oral history, archival research, participatory action research, surveys, focus groups, deconstruction and discourse analysis.

The structure of the course is designed to support students' progress in their degree programs while also challenging them to critique, intervene in and move beyond their own disciplinary knowledge and practices. In particular, students are expected to engage with research issues related to the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality which analyze the co-construction of gender, sexuality, race, class, citizenship, nation, ability and other categories of difference.

Depending on where the student is in their own program and research, this can take different forms, from bringing feminist methodological debates into a literature review for comprehensive exams, or proposing specific feminist research practices and design in a dissertation or grant proposal, analyzing issues related to research in progress, or working through writing issues toward publishing a chapter or article. The course aims to build an interdisciplinary community of feminist scholars to provide support and engagement in carrying out feminist research projects and interrogating their theoretical, substantive, ethical and political implications. This course is a 3 credit seminar for graduate students who are currently accepted into the WGSS Graduate Certificate in Advanced Feminist Studies. Other students will be admitted based on their background, interests and current research projects and their intention to apply to the certificate program.

Learning Goals for Students

- 1) to gain knowledge of key issues and critical debates in feminist research
- 2) to make meaningful contributions and interventions into these issues and debates
- 3) to apply knowledge of feminist research in furthering students' own research projects
- 4) to create a supportive and rigorous learning environment and intellectual community
- 5) to participate in the larger projects of feminist scholarship and transformation

Requirements

This course follows a seminar format, which means that it is based mostly on class discussion and student presentations. Our role as instructors is to facilitate and contextualize debates, rather than to summarize readings or dictate interpretations. This format requires that you come prepared to think critically, articulate ideas coherently, listen attentively and respect the diversity perspectives of your classmates.

We have designed the assignments to facilitate engagement with the course readings, to foster informed discussions and to encourage you to make connections to your own research projects. We ask each of you to contribute to building a classroom environment based on trust, confidentiality and community while at the same time challenging each other in intellectually rigorous and respectful discussions.

- **Class participation (15%)** Class participation includes regular attendance and informed contributions to discussion. This does not mean dominating discussion, but also means asking questions, engaging with other students and allowing for silences and pauses for reflection. You are expected to print or download all readings and bring them to class with you, along with written or typed notes, questions and comments to inform your participation. You are also responsible for reading the comments on Moodle (see below) and bringing interesting threads into classroom discussion and building on them.

You are expected to attend every class session and to let me know the reason for absences ahead of time. In order for an absence to count as excused, you need to post a reflection paper and comments for the week that you will miss according to the regular schedule below, or arrange an alternative if this is not possible. In addition, throughout the semester, students will be expected to provide informed peer feedback to other students' work.

- **Reflections and Comments on Moodle (25%) students will pick a date to post reflections on the readings (1-2 double-spaced pages posted by Mon 10pm) and responses to the panel discussion (10%); and at least 3 comments (5%) responding to other students' reflections by Wed 10am. In addition, all students should complete the March 6 exercise on IRB and ethics and post to Moodle by Mon 10 pm (5%)**

You will write two reflection papers on the readings (we will sign up for dates). While these need not be formal essays, they should be succinct, cogent and well-organized. Each paper should: 1) identify and critique key concepts and debates in that week's assigned readings (you do not have to discuss all the readings equally but should address themes that emerge across readings); 2) draw connections to issues in your own research; and 3) pose questions for further reflection and discussion. Students need time before class to read your reflection, so if you post after the deadline of Mon 10p, it will be penalized. You should read responses to your paper and be prepared to dialogue with students who have commented. Whether or not you post a reflection paper that week, we would like you to read all the other reflection papers and come to class prepared to discuss them. These comments should be clear, respectful and constructive and refer specifically to points in their papers. It is fine to agree or disagree with others' arguments, but these critiques must focus on intellectual debates and refrain from ad hominem attacks. *Please keep a file of your comments over the semester and hand it in at the end of the semester in a single word doc.*

- **Book Review (15%) 3-5 double spaced pages due Mon, Feb 18, posted to Moodle by 10p, bring hard copy to class on Feb 20.** Students will write a book review of a recent book (published in the last 3 years) in their area of research and critique it from the perspective of debates in feminist research. You will discuss at least three assigned readings to address issues of epistemologies, methodologies and methods in your chosen book. The goal of this assignment is to apply the knowledge you are developing in class toward critiquing research in your field, as well as to produce a publishable book review that you could then consider publishing. You will post your reviews on Moodle and give feedback by the next class session on another student's paper.

- **Research Portfolio (50% prospectus, presentation, final paper, feedback)**

Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography (10%) due Mon, March 10, posted to Moodle by 10p, bring hard copy to class on March 12 Your prospectus (4-6 double-spaced pages not including bibliography) should address the following four questions: 1) What is your topic and what do you hope to contribute to the conversation; 2) Why is it important for feminist research; 3) Who are the stakeholders and audience you hope to reach; and 4) How will you design and carry out your project? In addition, you will include a two-part annotated bibliography (3-5 sentence annotations explaining the importance of each text for your project). Part One will include 5-10 sources related to your research topic (these sources can provide substantive background and/or relevant theoretical frameworks). Part Two will include 5-10 sources on feminist research that address the epistemologies, methodologies or methods in your study. In your annotations, be specific about how each text informs your study. You can include assigned texts but at least three in each part should be sources you have located on your own.

Class Presentation (10%) During the last few weeks of class, you will sign up for a date to present on your final project. In addition to presenting on feminist issues in your own research, you will draw connections to important debates that we have addressed in the course.

Final Paper (12-15 double-spaced pages, not including bibliography – 25%) there are three possible due dates depending on when you sign up to present– see last three weeks on course schedule) Your final paper can be a stand-alone research paper or a proposal for a

larger research project, analyzing issues in feminist research related to an actual or possible project, incorporating interdisciplinary feminist debates regarding epistemologies, methodologies and method. The paper should demonstrate understanding and critical thinking regarding relevant issues in feminist research that we have addressed throughout the semester, and examine ways that these issues relate to your particular research project.

Critical Feedback on Another Students Paper (5%) Students will read and provide written comments on another student's paper and presentation. See schedule for dates.

- **Academic Honesty** Academic dishonesty, in any form, will not be tolerated and you are responsible for educating yourself about the University's academic honesty policies, especially proper citation practices, and adhering to them. Most incidences of dishonesty or plagiarism are unintentional, but ignorance is not an excuse. (http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/#D)
- **Accommodations.** If you need accommodations, I will work with you to support your learning and your ability to complete assignments. Please discuss your needs for accommodation with me directly and access services through Disability Services (<http://www.umass.edu/disability/current.html>).

Course Schedule

The syllabus is subject to change. I do my best not to make excessive or last minute changes, but you can expect some adjustments as I try to be responsive to students' interests and needs as they develop over the course.

IMPORTANT DATES:

- **Feb 18** Book Reviews posted on Moodle by 10 pm, bring hard copy to class on Feb 20
- **March 11:** Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography posted on Moodle by 10pm, hard copy due in class March 13
- **April 10, 24 and May 1: (NO CLASS April 17)** Student Presentations, Discussion and Feedback, due dates for final papers and comments will depend on the dates you present, *(There will be three different dates for students to present their work. Students will pick a date to present, then hand in their paper the following Monday. Then each student will have a partner who will give comments on their paper. Comments are due the following Friday so the dates will be as follows – see Weeks 11-13 for dates.)*

Week One

- Jan 23 Introduction to the Course: What is Feminist Research?**
- Overview of course content, assignments and expectations. Self-introductions. Form peer feedback groups.

Week Two

- Jan 30 What Makes Feminist Research Feminist?: Epistemologies, Methodologies, Methods**
- Sprague, "The Field of Vision" and "Seeing through Science"
 - Collins "Black Feminist Epistemology"
 - Harding "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology"
 - Narayan "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Non-Western Feminist"
 - (start thinking about and selecting book for book review assignment due on Feb 18 and read Prof Subramaniam's review of *Making Kin Not Population: Reconceiving Generations*)
 - <https://www.publicbooks.org/overpopulation-is-not-the-problem/>

Week Three

Feb 6 What Are the Objects of Feminist Research?: Intersectionality and De-Universalizing Gender

- Butler and Weed "Introduction" in *A Question of Gender: Joan W. Scott's Critical Feminism*
- McCall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality"
- Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes"
- Dolmage and Lewieki-Wilson "Refiguring Rhetorica: Linking Feminist Rhetoric and Disability Studies"
- Luibhéid, "Queer/Migration"

Week Four

Feb 13 Who Are the Subjects of Feminist Research?: Subjectivity, Reflexivity and Positionality

You can write a regular reflection paper for this week OR do one of the three assignments at the end of the Micciche article OR do an email correspondence with a classmate like in the Yanay and Berkovitch article OR insert reflexive creative writing using Cho as a model

- Micciche, "Writing as Feminist Rhetorical Theory"
- Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora* Chap 1 (Chap 5 is also posted and is optional)
- Yanay and Berkovitch, "Gender Imago: Searching for New Feminist Methodologies"
- Hammers and Brown, "Toward a Feminist-Queer Alliance"

Week Five

Feb 20 What are the Stakes of Feminist Research?: Political Transformation, Institutionalization and the Context of Neoliberalism

**Book
review
due on
Moodle
Feb 18**

- Mohanty, "U.S. Empire and the Project of Women's Studies"
- Ong, "Higher Learning in Global Spaces"
- Rooney, "The Marginalization of Feminist Epistemology and What it Reveals about Epistemology 'Proper'"
- Fonow and Cook, "Feminist Methodology: New Applications in the Academy and Public Policy"

Week Six

Feb 27 What are the Boundaries of Feminist Research?: Disciplinarity and Inter/Disciplinarity

- Allen and Kitch, "Disciplined by Disciplines?"
- Kitch and Fonow, "Women's Studies Dissertations"
- Subramaniam, "Moored Metamorphoses: A Retrospective Essay on Feminist Science Studies"
- Sotirin and Bergvall, "Interdisciplinarity in Communication, Language and Gender Studies"

Week Seven

March 6 What are the Ethics of Feminist Research?: Morality, Accountability and IRBs

- *For this week, all students should look on-line for your discipline's and/or UMass' statement of research ethics, print it out and post it, read and critique it from the perspective of feminist research ethics using the following readings*
- Brown, "Thinking in Time: An Epilogue on Ethics and Politics"
- Preissle, "Feminist Research Ethics"
- Jaggar "Globalizing Feminist Ethics"
- Halse and Honey, "Unraveling Ethics: Illuminating the Moral Dilemmas of Research Ethics"

MARCH 13 - SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS

Week Eight

March 20 Where Has Feminist Research Been and Where is it Going?: Genealogies, Conflicts and Directions

- C. Hemmings. *Why Stories Matter*. Part One

Week Nine

March 27 Why Do Feminist Stories Matter?: Citational Practices and Affect

- C. Hemmings. *Why Stories Matter* Part Two

Week Ten

April 3 How Do Feminist Research?: Power, Politics and Participatory Action

- Sangtin Writers, *Playing with Fire*
- Eubanks, "Double Bound"

Week Eleven, Twelve and Thirteen

(There will be three different dates for students to present their work. Students will pick a date to present, then hand in their paper the following Monday. Then each student will have a partner who will give comments on their paper. Comments are due the following Friday so the dates will be as follows)

April 10 What are Future Directions for Feminist Research?

April 17 No Class – Wed is a Mon Schedule Due to Patriot's Day on Mon April 15

April 24 Student Presentations and Feedback

Students who present on this day will turn in their papers on Monday, April 29. Their partner will turn in written comments on the paper by Friday, May 3.

May 1 Student Presentations and Feedback

Students who present on this day will turn in their papers on Monday, May 6. Their partner will turn in written comments on the paper by Friday, May 10.

Grades are due on May 14, so please respect the deadlines for the final paper according to the dates that you signed up to present, otherwise we will have a hard time reading and grading papers on time.