

WGSS 201

Gender & Difference: Critical Analyses

This syllabus is a living document. I expect it to evolve and change, with readings substituted, added, or removed, depending upon the interests of our group this semester. Please make sure to read the material assigned for each class session before coming to class and don't forget to check Moodle for updates!

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course is an interdisciplinary introduction to key concepts and analytical categories in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. The course grapples with gender in its complex intersection with other systems of power and inequality, including: sexuality, race and ethnicity, religion, class, and nation. Topics may include: Transnational feminisms, gendered labor and the global economy, feminist and queer theory, sexual violence, carceral politics, gender justice and rights-based advocacy, science and technology, visual cultures.

COURSE GOALS/OBJECTIVES:

- Acquire the tools to analyze gender in its complex intersection with other systems of power and inequality.
- Develop interdisciplinary, transnational, and intersectional thinking.
- Develop a critical vocabulary, drawing on a range of methodological approaches and intellectual traditions, for deep critical thinking about gender, sexuality, and feminisms, intimate and global, in the US context and transnationally.
- Develop broad knowledge of the major themes, critical questions, and political debates at the heart of women's, gender, and sexuality studies research, scholarship, and activism.
- Learn to apply the critical and analytical skills developed in the course to other courses, other fields of study, and to work, life, and experience beyond the university.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

PARTICIPATION (20%): Active participation and regular attendance are expected. No more than two unexcused absences are permitted. If you miss a class for any reason, you will be responsible for what you have missed as well as for obtaining any in-class handouts or course assignments.

- **READINGS:** Readings for class should be completed by the date listed on the course calendar, below. Please bring copies of all readings to class. All readings will be posted to Moodle except for *Juliet Takes a Breath* by Gabby Rivera (11/7) and *Becoming Unbecoming* by Una (11/21). You will need to access copies of these novels by the dates listed above.
- **A NOTE ON CLASSROOM COMMUNITY AND DISCOURSE:** Making time to build and maintain a committed community of learners is a major part of this course. You are expected to contribute to community-building in this classroom by coming to class, arriving on time, staying until the end, and being present in mind and body when you are here. You are expected to arrive having thoroughly read and analyzed the assigned

readings. A sense of community is seriously undermined when one person is doing other things while another is trying to communicate their ideas. Therefore, do not text, email, facebook, tweet, or otherwise allow yourself to be distracted during this class. If you are physically in class but noticeably unprepared or uninvolved (didn't read, not truly listening or participating, engaged with non-class communications rather than what's going on in class, or didn't do assigned work), your grade will be reduced.

CAMPUS EVENT REPORTS (10%): Attend two scheduled lectures or panel presentations held at the 5 Colleges this fall and related in any way to the themes of our course. Please sign up for the WGSS events listserv to get alerts about upcoming events of interest to the WGSS community. Make sure, also, to keep up to date on "My UMass," which includes a complete calendar of campus events. After attending each event, please submit a 1-2-page report in the following format:

- Part I Summary: Event description? Main points of discussion/debate?
- Part II Reflections: Your thoughts and ideas about what you have heard, as well as how they connect to the readings and topics in this course.

Report #1 must be completed by or before October 17th.

Report #2 must be completed by or before December 10th.

RESPONSE PAPERS (30%): Two times over the course of the semester, please select a text assigned for the day's class and compose a 3 page response essay. Your paper must be submitted on the same day that the text you have selected appears on the syllabus for class discussion. You may use the following format as a general guide, but you may also choose to approach this exercise in another format that makes more sense to you:

- Part I: Summary Describe clearly and in detail the primary argument of the text, using direct quotations from the text (with page citations) to support your claims.
- Part II: Response This is the analytical portion of your essay and should engage with the basic argument you introduced in Part I.
- Some questions to think about in your response, include: What is especially interesting or important, frustrating or provoking about the argument you identified in Part I? What are some of the basic assumptions on which this argument depends? What is the larger impact of this argument? What are possible counterarguments to the text's claims? What are its limitations?
- You are encouraged (and your grade will positively reflect) your efforts to make connections and explore similarities and differences, conflicts and contradictions, among a range of course texts. Some questions to consider include: What are some of the ways your texts are in conversation with each other? What are some of the important ways in which the texts agree? Disagree? Address different aspects of an issue? Formulate a problem in different ways? In what ways (if any) does the information or argument of one text strengthen or weaken the argument of 6 others? Does integrating the claims in two or more of the texts advance your understanding of a larger issue?

Response Paper #1 must be completed by or before October 17th

Response Paper #2 must be completed by or before December 5th.

MEDIA FILE PROJECT (40%):

1. Select a general topic that is connected in some way to our course theme of Gender & Difference. Examples of topics include: reproductive justice, body politics, violence (state, intimate, gender-based, etc.), labor (domestic and/or transnational), mass incarceration, trans politics, sex education, gender/sexuality and the law, etc. **A written proposal, consisting of your chosen topic and one or two lines of description, will be due on Thursday, October 31st.** Please don't hesitate to come in to meet with me before (or after) October 31st to discuss your ideas!
2. Select at least three different media sources that are connected to your general topic for in-depth analysis. Sources may include film, video, social media, television, music, advertising, etc. Annotate all of your media sources (details below).
3. Craft a 5-page, argument-driven essay that explicitly addresses the ways in which gender and sexuality interact with other structures of power and difference to produce the cultural message(s) about your chosen topic. To accompany this paper, you will have an opportunity to share your project with the class in the form of a presentation, scheduled during the last week of the semester.

Your media file will consist of two parts: Part I (due 11/19): Annotations of your media sources. Annotations should be short but dense (no more than 2 pages each) and should be organized as follows:

1. Authorship (Who made this text?) and context (Where is the source from and when was it produced?)
2. Purpose: What is the explicit message? Who is speaking? Who is the target audience? At which social group is the text aimed and how do you know?
3. Analysis: Why is this media source interesting or important? What do these sources assert or imply about the nature of gender & sexuality and how they are connected to other forms of power – for example: class, nation, race, ethnicity, religion, etc., etc.? How does this source rely on and/or challenge any of the familiar hierarchies, assumptions, basic principles or relationships that we have studied? Each annotation must be accompanied by a media link to the source.

Part II (due 12/5): 5-page argument-driven essay and presentation. Using course materials and class notes to help ground your intersectional analysis, craft a persuasive, evidence-based essay that is focused on the ways in which media messages about your chosen topic rely on, reinforce, challenge, and/or transform ideas about gender and sexuality and their interactions with other structures of power and difference. You will have an opportunity to share your project with the class in the form of a presentation, scheduled during the last week of the semester. Presentations should be designed in Power Point (or Google Slides or comparable) and should include the following:

- Description of your project thesis
- Brief analysis of 1-2 visual examples from your project to illustrate your thesis.

Media File--Overview of Expectations:

A successful essay persuasively supports a clear, succinct thesis through close analysis. The essay will be well organized, with each point leading back to the thesis and body paragraphs developing points in a thoughtful and logical progression. Points will be made by close reading of the media sources, which entails analyzing specific elements of the sources, rather than broadly summarizing or simply quoting from them.

Selecting media: Remember that this project requires at least three different types of sources, such as film, television, music video, print advertisement, etc. If you include film or television, you should focus your analysis on a short (1-2 minute) clip. There isn't enough space in a 5-page analysis to tackle an entire film, for example. Thesis A good thesis should be arguable, specific, and have a reasonable scope. You should be able to condense your thesis into one or two sentences. If this is not possible, then your topic may be too broad or too complex for a short (5 page) paper.

ARGUABILITY: Your thesis should make a claim that you can argue about the “cultural work” that is done by your media sources. This means that your thesis can be defended with evidence, but it could also be disputed. If every reasonably intelligent person (such as all your peers at UMass) would agree with it, then it is not a thesis. You should be able to think of a hypothetical counterargument. You do NOT need to make the counterarguments in your essay. However, you should consider whether it would be possible to do so, in order to decide if you have articulated a good thesis. Important Tip: a thesis is not a statement of belief or a matter of personal taste. “I like these ads” or “these ads are racist and sexist” are judgments; they are not analytic statements that can be supported or disputed with evidence.

SPECIFICITY: The language of your thesis should be specific. Use descriptive, vivid terminology. Don't be vague! Example: “These representations of sexual harassment reproduce and challenge normative assumptions about sexual harassment” is TOO VAGUE. Why? Because this sentence doesn't specify which “normative assumptions” are being challenged, nor does it allude to which media sources reproduce or challenge normative assumptions and how they do so.

IMPORTANT DATES:

10/31: Proposal Due

11/19: Annotations Due

12/5: Essay Due

12/5 & 10: Presentations

CONTENT NOTE: *This class addresses sexuality, violence, racism, homophobia (among many other things) and contains materials with explicit content, including rape and sexual violence. WGSS scholars and activists have been engaged in a long and arduous struggle for the right to teach these materials. This class explores some of the reasons and ramifications of these struggles and the crucial debates they continue to inspire.*

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS:

Tuesday 9/3: INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

Thursday, 9/5: ADVOCATING FEMINISM

- bell hooks, "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression"
- Jia Tolentino, "How 'Empowerment' Became Something for Women to Buy"
- Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger"
- Sara Ahmed, "Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects)"
- Tavia Nyong'o and Kyla Wazana Tompkins, "Eleven Theses on Civility"

Tuesday, 9/10: KEY TERMS

- Margaret Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins, "Race, Class, and Gender"
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, selections
- June Jordan, "Report from the Bahamas"

Thursday, 9/12: GENEALOGIES OF FEMINISM

- Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement"
- *INCITE Women of Color Against Violence & Critical Resistance*, "Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex"
- "Women's March on Washington: Guiding Vision and Definition and Principles"
- Julia Serano, "Trans Woman Manifesto"
- Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"
- Patrisse Cullors, "On A Lifetime of Activism and the Founding of BLM" (podcast)

Tuesday, 9/17: RESISTANCE, SOLIDARITY, & TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST PRACTICE

- Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes"

Thursday, 9/19: RESISTANCE, SOLIDARITY, & TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST PRACTICE II

- Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?"
- Leti Volpp, "Disappearing Acts: On Gendered Violence, Pathological Cultures, and Civil Society"

Tuesday, 9/24: THINKING INTERSECTIONALLY I

- Flavia Dzodan, "My Feminism Will Be Intersectional Or It Will Be Bullshit"
- Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color"
- VIDEO: Kimberle Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality"

- Amber Hollibaugh and Margot Weiss, “Queer Precarity and the Myth of Gay Affluence”

Tuesday, 9/26: THINKING INTERSECTIONALLY II

- Jennifer Nash, “Black Feminism Reimagined After Intersectionality”
- *Linda Burnham, "The Absence of a Gender Justice Framework in Social Justice Organizing" (not used in Fall 2019)*

Thursday, 10/1: TRANS ACTIVISM & TRANS FEMINISMS

- FILM: Major!
- Jack Halberstam, "Towards a Trans* Feminism"
- Sassafrass Lowrey, "Shifting My Pack"

Thursday, 10/3: PATRIARCHY & POWER

- bell hooks, “Understanding Patriarchy”
- Lisa Wade and Myra Marx Ferree, “Inequality: Men and Masculinities”
- C.J. Pascoe, "Dude, You're A Fag: Adolescent Male Homophobia"
- Amanda Marcotte, “Overcompensation Nation”

Thursday, 10/8: QUEERING THEORY/THINKING SEX

- Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”

Tuesday, 10/10: QUEERING THEORY/THINKING SEX II

- Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality”
- Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?"

Tuesday 10/15: NO CLASS, MONDAY SCHEDULE

Thursday, 10/17 – PERFORMING GENDER

*****LAST DAY to submit your FIRST CAMPUS EVENT REPORT*****

*****LAST DAY to submit your FIRST RESPONSE PAPER*****

- Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory"

- Paul B. Preciado, *Testo-Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* ([excerpts](#))

Tuesday, 10/22: READING GENDER, SEXUALITY, & RACE IN VISUAL CULTURE

- John Berger, "Ways of Seeing"
- bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze"
- Caroline Heldman, "Sexual Objectification"
- Jean Kilbourne, Tedx Talk (2015): <https://youtu.be/Uy8yLaoWybk>

Thursday, 10/24: READING GENDER, SEXUALITY, & RACE IN VISUAL CULTURE II: BEYONCÉ, SERENA, & THE POLITICS OF BLACKNESS

- Jaime Schultz, "Reading the Catsuit: Serena Williams and the Production of Blackness at the 2002 U.S. Open"
- Brittney Cooper, "The Beyoncé Wars"
- Janelle Hobson, "Feminists Debate Beyoncé"
- Destinee Jackson, "Beyoncé, BEYONCE, Lemonade"
- Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Persistent Looking In Times of Crisis"

Tuesday, 10/29: BODIES OF EVIDENCE: SEX, GENDER, & SCIENCE

- Emily Martin, "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed A Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles"

Thursday, 10/31: DISABILITY, DIS-EASE

- Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept"
- Karen Soldatic and Shaun Grech, "Transnationalising Disability Studies: Rights, Justice and Impairment"
- Mia Mingus, "Moving Toward the Ugly: A Politic Beyond Desirability"
- Andrea Ritchie, "Policing (Dis)Ability"

Tuesday, 11/5: EDUCATION, OTHERNESS & TAKING UP SPACE

- Cindy Cruz, "Toward an epistemology of a brown body"
- Garland-Thomson, R., & Grumet, M. R., "*Teacher's Body, The: Embodiment, Authority, and Identity in the Academy*" p. 1-34
- Hetrick, A., & Attig, D., "Sitting Pretty"
- Erevelles, Nirmala, "Educating unruly bodies: Critical pedagogy, disability studies, and the politics of schooling"

Thursday 11/7: TESTIFYING INTERSECTIONALITY I

- Gabby Rivera, *Juliet Takes a Breath*
- Rebecca Solnit, “A Short History of Silence”

Tuesday, 11/12: TESTIFYING INTERSECTIONALITY II

- Gabby Rivera, *Juliet Takes a Breath* (continued)

Thursday 11/14: GENDER, SEXUALITY AND THE STATE: INTERROGATING CARCERAL FEMINISMS

- Kristin Bumiller, “Feminist Collaboration with the State in Response to Sexual Violence: Lessons from the American Experience”
- Elizabeth Bernstein, “Carceral politics as gender justice? The ‘traffic in women’ and neoliberal circuits of crime, sex, and rights”
- Angela Davis, “The Prison-Industrial Complex”
- Victoria Law, “Against Carceral Feminisms”
- VIDEO: “Ruth Wilson Gilmore: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTPjC-7EDkc>

Tuesday 11/19: GENDER, SEXUALITY AND THE STATE: INTERROGATING CARCERAL FEMINISMS II

- Kimberlé Crenshaw, Priscilla Ocen and Jyoti Nanda, “Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected”
- Andrea J. Ritchie, “Law Enforcement Violence Against WOC”
- FILM: Mothers of Bedford

*****MEDIA ANNOTATIONS DUE*****

Thursday 11/21: REFRAMING GENDERED VIOLENCE

- Anne McClintock, “Who’s Afraid of Title IX?”
- Caroline Heldman and Bailee Brown, “A Brief History of Sexual Violence Activism in the US”
- Vanessa Grigoriadis, *Blurred Lines: Rethinking Sex, Power, and Consent on Campus* (selections)
- Alexandra Brodsky and Elizabeth Deutsch, “The Promise of Title IX: Sexual Violence and the Law”
- Claude Mellins, et al., “Sexual assault incidents among college undergraduates: Prevalence and factors associated with risk”
- Una, *Becoming Unbecoming*

THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS (November 26 and 28)

Tuesday 12/3: TBD

Thursday, 12/5: FEMINIST FUTURES: ACTIVISM AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

- *Signs* interview/Cathy Cohen
- “Trans Action for Social and Economic Justice”
- Dorothy Roberts, Angela Davis, and additional readings TBA
- **MEDIA PRESENTATIONS #1**

*****MEDIA FILE DUE*****

Tuesday, 12/10 – MEDIA PRESENTATIONS/ LAST CLASS

*****LAST DAY to submit your second Campus Event Report*****

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. Following is a summary (you can read it in full at http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/code_conduct/acad_honest.htm): “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. The Board may also recommend sanctions for offenders who have committed multiple violations of the Academic Honesty Policy but who have not appealed the faculty members’ decisions.”

Helping someone else cheat is an offense as serious as cheating yourself. Although it is always appropriate to discuss the course material and assignments with each other, inside and outside class, it is *not* appropriate to collaborate on the writing of actual sentences.

Accommodations

If you have learning or other disabilities, it is my goal and that of the Disability Services to ensure that you have reasonable accommodations that minimize the impact of that disability on your learning or your ability to demonstrate what you have learned in the context of assignments. It is your choice whether to disclose your disability to me; you can simply access services through Disability Services (<http://www.umass.edu/disability/current.html>) and ask me to work with that office to provide appropriate accommodations. However, you do need to let me know that you will need accommodation at or near the beginning of the semester, well in advance of any assignments. If we agree on a modified timeline for the completion of assignments or alternative formats, you are still responsible for completing assignments in a timely way and attending class.

