

WGSS 791B - Feminist Theory

Course mailing list: wgss-791b-01-fal17@courses.umass.edu Term: Fall 2017

Instructor: K. Asher (kasher@umass.edu)

Office: W467 South College

Class time: Tu 1:00-3:30pm

Meets in: W465 South College

Office Hours: Tu 11:30am-12:30pm, or by appointment (check Moodle for times)

This seminar in feminist theory constitutes a core course for students enrolled in the Graduate Certificate in Advanced Feminist Studies. It is organized around questions that emerge for feminisms from multiple locations from the rubrics of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality to debates about economics, trans/nationalism, rights, and anti/de/post colonialism. By its nature feminist theory is about understanding and fostering social change. Thus, its debates or conversations are simultaneously analytical, ethical, and political. The goal of this seminar is to enable students to understand these debates and engage in critical dialogue with them through close readings of classic and contemporary feminist writings from across the many disciplines that contribute to the “field.”

Students are expected to have a prior grounding in social and political theory, or be prepared to gain it during the course of the semester. In the first part of the seminar we will begin discussing key feminist concerns and debates from historical and methodological perspectives. In the second part of the semester, we will revisit selected themes to deepen our understanding of feminist engagements revisiting with the role of the state, representation and race, the structure of the economy, the governing of sexuality, alternative forms of justice, or others you suggest. Students are expected to take an active and self-reflexive approach to the material and make connections between seminar themes and their own particular research interests.

Required Readings (ordered through Amherst Books unless on ereserve)

- ❖ Ahmed, Sara. 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press.
- ❖ Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge (Ereserve on Moodle)
- ❖ Foucault, Michel. 1978. *History of Sexuality: An Introduction, vol I*. Vintage.
- ❖ McCann, Carole and Seung-kyung Kim, eds. 2013/2017. *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*. 3rd or 4th edition. Routledge. (FTR below)
- ❖ Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton UP.
- ❖ Additional readings (as Ereserve or uploads on Moodle).

Background Readings (on ereserve or physical reserve at the DuBois Library)

- ❖ Lemert, Charles, ed. 2016. *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. (I especially recommend Lemert’s introductory essays to each section)
- ❖ Disch, Lisa and Hawkesworth Mary. 2015. [Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory](#). Oxford University Press.
- ❖ Jaggar, Alison. 1983. *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Rowman & Littlefield
- ❖ Weedon, Chris. 1997. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Blackwell

Assignments and Grades

| | |
|---|-----|
| ❖ Attendance & Participation | 25% |
| ❖ Two Short annotations (2 pages each) | 15% |
| ❖ Mid semester critical review (of 2 or more sets of readings) | 25% |
| ❖ Final Assignment: Annotated bibliography, literature review, or final paper(due Dec 18); prospectus (optional due Nov 30) | 35% |

Attendance and Absences: A seminar is a collective endeavor and its success depends on our being physically and intellectually present in class. Being a little late occasionally is understandable. However, if you are more than 10 minutes late, you will be marked absent. If you have to miss class because of legitimate reasons (illness, injury, death of a loved one), excuse your absence in writing within a week of the missed session. Over one absence will result in the lowering of your overall grade, as even excused absences will affect your participation grade. So try not to miss class. If you have to, know that it is your responsibility to catch up on what you missed. Set up a “study buddy” with whom you can exchange notes, review material, and check in about intellectual or logistical issues related to the class.

Participation means active and mindful engagement with the course material and seminar participants, including your peers. So do the assigned readings and any other work before coming to class. Develop a practice of reading closely to prepare for class discussions, which will focus on:

- ❖ the main points and key terms of each reading (so identify good quotes)
- ❖ how arguments are substantiated or claims developed
- ❖ the relevance on the argument of the authors biography and other context of the assigned texts (so do some background sleuthing)
- ❖ how each reading is in conversation with other pieces for that week and prior weeks (does it build on them? Contest them? Both? How and why?)
- ❖ critically assessing the contributions, limits, and questions generated by the readings and approaches

We will be doing a lot of reading and deep thinking. So be patient with yourselves and with each other so that we may grapple productively with important ideas and debates. This includes learning to disagree respectfully and being comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Using smart phones in class is decidedly un-smart. When in class **turn OFF your mobile devices.** You may use your computer in class to refer to readings and notes, and to take notes. However, please do not connect to the Internet.

Moodle, online communications and Email etiquette: Instructions, study questions, and updates about the seminar will be posted on **Moodle** and/or sent through the class lists (see above). So make sure that your university email (yourname@umass.edu) is functional, and check Moodle regularly. Please contact OIT if you have any problems. Here’s a guide I wrote for my undergraduates [Emails as Professional Correspondences or Email Etiquette.](#)

Writing: As graduate students you know that good writing is crucial. I've frontloaded a few short written assignments so I can give you feedback. **Further guidelines** for written assignments will be discussed in class and **posted on Moodle**. There are also plenty of writing resources on campus, online and within the WGSS department. Make a little time to seek help. Your writing will improve dramatically!

Finally, all **written assignments**:

- ❖ May be discussed with your peers, with the WGSS writing tutor or with me during my office hours
- ❖ Must be submitted **by the stated deadlines and stated format (hard copy or online)**. By handing in assignments late you forfeit your right to comments and lose half a letter grade for every day that your work is late.
- ❖ May be revised and resubmitted within two weeks of receiving comments back. Submit hardcopies of your substantially revised written work along with the original submission, the comments you received on it, and a note indicating the revisions made. Note that resubmitting a paper does not guarantee a higher grade. In fact, cursorily rewritten work may receive a lower grade than the original.
- ❖ Should comply with the **Checklist of Written Work guidelines** (see below).
- ❖ Will be graded according to the **criteria** listed below.
- ❖ Sometimes I give slash grades (B/B+). This means that the assignment is tending towards the higher grade but is not there yet. If you do better in the next assignment of a similar nature, the prior one will automatically be graded higher.

CRITERIA FOR GRADING WRITTEN WORK

A = a well organized, lucidly written paper free of mechanical errors (or oral argument) that indicates your thorough understanding of the material and your interesting insights or critical responses to it. In a phrase, an A paper is a "perfect 10" paper.

B = a paper (or presentation) that offers evidence of your understanding of the material, but in which your points are obscured due to mechanical errors, lack of organization, inadequate evidence and/or insufficiently developed arguments.

C = a paper in which the student's understanding and response to the material is unclear or largely obscured due to any one or more factors listed under B.

D, F = indicate that students are submitting unacceptable work.

GRADE CHART

| | Out of 10 | Out of 5 | GPA |
|----|-----------|-----------|-----|
| A | 9.3 - 10 | 4.7 - 4.9 | 4 |
| A- | 8.6 - 9.2 | 4.3 - 4.6 | 3.7 |
| B+ | 7.9 - 8.5 | 4.0 - 4.2 | 3.3 |
| B | 7.2 - 7.8 | 3.6 - 3.9 | 3.0 |
| B- | 6.5 - 7.1 | 3.3 - 3.5 | 2.7 |
| C+ | 5.8 - 6.4 | 3.0 - 3.2 | 2.3 |
| C | 5.1 - 5.7 | 2.6 - 2.9 | 2.0 |
| C- | 4.4 - 5.0 | 2.3 - 2.5 | 1.7 |
| D+ | 3.7 - 4.3 | 2.0-2.2 | 1.7 |
| D | 3.0 - 3.6 | 1.9 - 1.7 | 1.0 |
| F | 2.7 - 2.9 | | 0.0 |

Office Hours will be listed and updated on Moodle, and are usually at the bottom of my signature file on emails. Do stop by to brainstorm research ideas, talk about topics that sparked your intellectual curiosity, or discuss concerns. However, office hours are not the time to review course material you missed or entertain inquiry such as “I was absent, what did I miss?” Check Moodle, talk to your study buddy first and then follow up with me to discuss specific queries.

Accommodation Statement: Disability Services (DS) on campus keeps documentation on file of physical, psychological, or learning disability and provides services to students with disabilities: <http://www.umass.edu/disability/>. They also act as a liaison between students and professors. If you need accommodations related to disabilities, please contact DS and me within the first two weeks of the term (before the add/drop period ends) so that we can work together to meet your learning needs. *A letter from Disability Services is not sufficient excuse for late or missed work or absences.* If, after consulting the syllabus, you anticipate missing classes or think you will need alternative formats and timelines for assignments, please communicate with me in person during office hours so that we can make mutually agreeable arrangements.

Academic Honesty Statement: Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at UMass. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent (http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/).

Pronoun Statement: I will gladly address you by the name you prefer and use the gender pronouns that correspond to your gender identity. Please advise the class and me on your name and pronoun preference, and the proper pronunciation of your name.

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Checklist for Written Work for Prof Asher, AKA her 20 COMMANDMENTS!

1. I have a central argument or a main point and I state it clearly.
2. I define the key terms on which my argument is based.
3. I have developed my argument systematically and organized my points clearly. That is, my points follow from each other and speak to my central argument.
4. I substantiate my claims with supporting evidence, and cite relevant sources using a correct and consistent format. Prof Asher prefers the author-date style:
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html
5. By the middle of my paper, I have lost neither clarity nor focus.
6. I make clear transitions between my points and between paragraphs and sections.
7. The passive voice has not been used by me. Instead, I use the active voice.
8. I have edited my paper and it is free from repeated errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar, and I have used short sentences and made sure that my sentences do not run on like this one does.
9. My sources are formatted correctly and consistently, as is my Reference List.
10. My paper has a title, which tells my reader what my paper is about. In my introductory and concluding remarks, I neither over generalize nor make banal claims. Rather, I begin and conclude with insightful remarks about my topic.

Logistical and Mechanical details checklist

1. My name, date, course name and number, type and number of the assignment, appear single-spaced in the upper left hand corner of the first page.
2. I have used a legible font, double-spaced my writing, and used 1-inch margins.
3. There are NO double-returns between my paragraphs.
4. I have numbered all the pages of my assignment
5. I have STAPLED all the pages of my assignment. Prof Asher will not accept paper clipped papers.
6. I am NOT including a cover page or a report cover with my assignments.
7. I am submitting my paper on time and in the format (hardcopy or electronic) indicated. Rubric for naming electronic documents: Your Last Name _ Assignment_Course#_Term, e.g.
Asher_Annotation1_791BFall2017
8. I accept that if I hand in late papers I forfeit the right to comments and will lose half a letter grade for each day the paper is late. Please DO NOT email me late papers.
9. I understand what plagiarism (<http://www.umass.edu/writingprogram/geninfo/plagiarism.html>) means and have avoided it.

10. I have conferenced this assignment at the Writing Center (<http://www.umass.edu/writingcenter/>) if necessary, or at the very least I have read and addressed the issues in Section V of Strunk and White's The Elements of Style.

Course Schedule: This is a working course schedule and is subject to change. For example, readings may be added or substituted at the professor's discretion. The readings listed under each week are for that week. That is, please read the listed material before coming to class.

Week 1: Multiple Genealogies of Feminist Thought and multiple forms of Knowledge Production: Why theory? What theory? Theorizing what?

Tu, Sept 5:

- ❖ Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life* (Introduction and Part I)
- ❖ FTR: Introduction to the volume, and introductions to sections of the reader. Selections 1-7; 12 (The Combahee River Collective, *A Black Feminist Statement*), 30 (Lorde, *I am your sister: Black Women Organizing*), Boxes (from 4th edition) related to the terms in the selections
- ❖ Weedon, Chapter 1
- ❖ In-class discussion facilitated by the following questions: What is feminist theory? Why feminist theory? What is your favorite feminist theory text? Why? What problem or problematic does it engage? How? What are your learning goals from this class for the semester?
- ❖ Collect key terms and analytical questions to parse through the semester
- ❖ Introductions to seminar topics, participants, concerns, approaches

Suggested/Supplemental:

- ❖ Culler, Jonathan. 2011. What is Theory? Pp. 1-18 in *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Moodle)
- ❖ Humm, Maggie. 1982. Chronology of Events, and History of Feminism in Britain and America (xv-xx, 1-7), and Second Wave Feminism (53-60) in *Modern Feminisms*. Columbia University Press. (Ereserve through Moodle)
- ❖ Lemert, Charles. 2004. Social Theory: Its Uses and Pleasures. Pp. 1-11 in *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classical Readings*. Westview Press. (Moodle)

Week 2: Theorizing Women's Subjectivity: Humanism and Beyond

Tu, Sept 12:

- ❖ Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life* (Chapters 2 and 3)
- ❖ Ferguson, Kathy. 1993. Male Ordered Subjectivity. Pp. 36-68 in *The Man Question in Feminism: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory*. Univ of California Press. (Ereserve through Moodle)
- ❖ Rowley, Michelle V. 2010. Whose Time Is It? Gender and Humanism in Contemporary Caribbean Feminist Advocacy. *Small Axe* 31: 1-15 (Moodle)
- ❖ Viveros, Mara. 2015. Sex/Gender. Pp. 852-873 in *Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Disch, Lisa and Hawkesworth Mary, eds. Oxford University Press. (Moodle)

Suggested/Supplemental:

- ❖ Truth <http://www.sojournertruth.org/Library/Speeches/AintIAWoman.htm>
- ❖ Georg Hegel (Master-Slave) hyperlink not working but search on marxists.org/
- ❖ Spillers, Hortense. 1987. Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book, in Culture and Countermemory: The 'American' Connection, special issue, *Diacritics* 17(2) 68-81.
- ❖ Spillers, H et al. 2007. Whatcha you Gonna do. Revising Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe. *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35(1/2): 299-309.
- ❖ Scott, Joan W. 1988. Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis. Pp. 28-50 in *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York Columbia University Press.

Week 3: Gender, Labor, Production, and Reproduction

Tu, Sept 19:

- ❖ Weeks, Kathi *The Problem with Work* (Chpt 1; Chpt 3 or 4) (ereserve via Moodle)
- ❖ *Lace Makers of Narsapur*, Chpt 1 (Moodle)
- ❖ FTR: Haraway, *Situated Knowledges*, Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes;" Boxes: 7 (Marx), 13 (Althusser), 19 (Harvey)
- ❖ Erevelles, Nirmala. 2011. The "Other" Side of the Dialectic: Toward a Materialist Ethic of Care. Pp. 173-197 in *Disability and difference in global contexts: enabling a transformative body politic*. Palgrave MacMillan. (Moodle)
- ❖ ----. 2016. Disability in the New World Order. Pp. 25-31 in *Color of violence: the Incite! Anthology*. Duke University Press. (Moodle)

Suggested/Supplemental

- ❖ For excellent overview of the analytical parameters of the capitalist a mode of production, see Kloppenburg, *First the Seed*, pp. 22-27, and Chapter 3 of Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People without History* (Moodle)
- ❖ Hartmann, Heidi. 1979. The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more progressive union. *Capital and Class* vol 3: 1-33 (ereserve)
- ❖ Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. Selections from *The German Ideology* (on www.marxists.org, or reprinted in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 148-175. (The hyperlink to [marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org) does not work but type in the URL to find this website, which has many original Marxist texts and commentaries)
- ❖ <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/marxism/>
- ❖ Erevelles, Nirmala. additional readings on Moodle.
- ❖ Federici, Silvia. (2004). *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia.
- ❖ Nicholson, Linda. 1987. Feminism and Marxism: Integrating Kinship with the Economic. Pp. 16-30, 164-165 in *Feminism as Critique*. Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, eds. Univ of Minnesota Press.
- ❖ MacKinnon, Catharine. 1982. Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory. (Excerpt from Humm, *Modern Feminisms* on Moodle)

- ❖ Rubin, Gayle. 1974. The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex. Pp. 157-210, in *Towards an Anthropology of Women*. Reyna Reiter, ed. NY: Monthly Review Press (Ereserve on Moodle).

Week 4: Theorizing Subjectivity, Identity & Difference

Tu, Sept 26:

- ❖ Belsey, Catherine. 1980. Addressing the Subject. Pp. 56-84 in *Critical Practice*. Routledge. (Ereserve through Moodle)
- ❖ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I*
- ❖ Tikuna and Picq. 2016. *Queering Amazonia: Homo-affective relations among Tikuna society*. In Picq Manuela and María Amelia Viteri. *Queering Paradigms V: Queering Narratives of Modernity*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang. (Moodle)

Suggested readings for Week 4

- ❖ Chris Weedon, "Principles of Poststructuralism" and "Language and Subjectivity"
- ❖ Scott, Poovey, Christian, and Lazreg. 1988. *Feminist Studies* 14 (1): special issue on Feminism & Deconstruction. Available via JSTOR
<http://www.jstor.org.silk.library.umass.edu/stable/i359113>
- ❖ Althusser, Louis. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. pp. Pp. 127-186 in *Lenin and Philosophy, and other essays by Louis Althusser*, tr. Ben Brewster.
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>
- ❖ Felluga, Dino. "Modules on Althusser: On Ideology." *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. Jan 31, 2011. Purdue University. August 31, 2016.
<https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/marxism/modules/althusserideology.html>,
and "Modules on Althusser: On Ideological State Apparatuses." *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. Jan 31, 2011. Purdue Univ. Aug 31, 2016.
<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/marxism/modules/althusserISAs.html>

Week 5: Producing and Governing Sexualities

Tu, Oct 3

- ❖ Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble* (Ebook on reserve)
- ❖ Butler, J. 1993. Introduction and Bodies that Matter in *Bodies that Matter*. (Moodle)

Suggested:

- ❖ Georg Hegel (Master-Slave hyperlink not working but search on [marxists.org/](http://www.marxists.org/))
- ❖ Spillers, Hortense. Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe (see above for full citation)
- ❖ From FTR: Simone de Beauvoir: "Introduction" to *The Second Sex*, Monique Wittig, *One is Not Born a Woman*; Charlotte Bunch, *Lesbians in Revolt*; bell hooks, *Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression*.
- ❖ Irigaray, Kristeva in Humm, *Modern Feminisms* (Ereserve on Moodle)
- ❖ Freud, Sigmund. 1905 (1990). Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (abridged). Pp. 89-145 in *Freud on Women: A Reader*. Elisabeth Young-Breuhl, ed. W.W. Norton (ereserve), or full text

- ❖ Young-Breuhl, Elisabeth. 1990. Introduction. Pp. 1-47 in *Freud on Women*
- ❖ Freud: <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/psychoanalysis/freud.html>
- ❖ Lacan <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/psychoanalysis/lacanstructure.html>

Oct 10: Fall Break, Monday schedule, no class.

Hard copies of Midterm Critical Review due by noon Thursday, Oct 12

From Week 8 to Week 12 we will revisit certain themes/readings from the first part of the semester and also focus on student- selected topics and readings. We will discuss these in class. See Moodle for topics and reading lists from the previous seminars

Week 6, Tu, Oct 17:

- ❖ Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World* (all)

Week 7, Oct 24:

- ❖ Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life* (all)

Week 8, Oct 31: Student- selected topics and readings

Week 9, Tu: Nov 7: Student- selected topics and readings

Week 10, Tu, Nov 14: Student- selected topics and readings

Nov 18-26: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 11, Nov 28: Student- selected topics and readings

Week 12, Dec 5: Student- selected topics and readings

Week 13: Tu, Dec 12: WRAP UP